Designing Technology That Cares

Written by Kristian Partington

When her husband Don suffered a stroke in early 2014, Mary Buhr-Nightingale, driven by their deep love and commitment, became his main support. Reflecting on this most recent chapter of their lives, Mary has often thought that many don’t realize the depth of care a loved one gives or how much their work is undervalued.

Her efforts were guided by love, yes, but it wasn’t easy, and even after Don moved into the Village at University Gates in the spring of 2016, Mary remained at the core of his support team. When most people consider a situation such as theirs, Mary suggests they only see the needs of the person receiving the support while the needs of the family care partner are secondary, tertiary or perhaps not even on the radar.

That’s why she was grateful to participate in a three-day “Designing Technology that Cares” workshop at the Schlegel-UW Research Institute for Aging in June. The workshop, made possible with the support of AGE-WELL, CIHR, TENA and RIA, focused on how technology could be designed to be more considerate of care partners’ needs as well as its impact on the care partner / care recipient relationship. More than 40 people attended representing a wide diversity of stakeholders, including industry experts, researchers, students, paid care partners who work in the sector and seven family care partners.

“We really wanted to create a workshop where everyone felt that they were colleagues and collaborators,” says Dr. Jennifer Boger, Schlegel Research Chair in Technology for Independent Living and the workshop’s lead organizer. “We involved people from different stakeholder groups in the actual design of the workshop, which took a lot of time...but it paid off.”

Thanks to the efforts of a diverse planning committee, many attendees noted this was one of the most effective brainstorming, idea sharing events they had ever participated in. A large part of that success came from the sincere and honest input...
Annual Spirituality & Aging Seminar

The annual Spirituality and Aging Seminar will take place on Friday November 17th at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo. This year’s seminar is titled *The Need for a Spiritual Revolution in Residential Care*. Kristine Theurer (Founder of Java Group Programs) will engage attendees in conversation about the risks of loneliness and social isolation in our later years, and the revolutionary potential of peer support. Participants will be guided through an interactive learning process and peer support group demonstration to explore how we can engage in building community, in residential care or other settings.

Learn more at www.the-ria.ca/news-events/events.
Designing Technology that Cares

...Mary and her fellow care partners offered while exploring the themes of the workshop:

• How can technologies support the needs of care partners as whole people (including outside the context of providing care)?
• How can technologies support the relationship between the care partner and care recipient?
• How can care partners become more involved in the process of creating technologies intended to support them?

“The family care partners were central to the workshop,” Dr. Boger says. “It was very different in that respect. Most effective workshops focus on a topic area that has not been covered specifically before.” She points out that the June RIA workshop grew out of a conversation she had with several leaders in the field of age-related technology research at Montreal’s AGE-WELL conference in 2016, where they determined that a major perspective was missing in the discussions about assistive technology.

“There was a little bit of frustration,” Dr. Boger says, recalling a conversation she had with colleagues at the AGE-WELL conference. “Technologies aimed at caregivers are mostly focused on how to help the carer provide better care to the recipient. Not that that shouldn’t be a focus – of course it should – but they tend to ignore the fact that carers are whole people with other passions in life: hobbies, jobs and a need for time for themselves.”

Without hearing firsthand what daily challenges are faced within the caregiving and support dynamic, researchers and designers can never hope to answer the needs of the future. The discussions at the June event were rich and meaningful, Dr. Boger says, because “they illuminated the complexity, emotionality, and humanness of caregiving that is integral to understanding why technologies can fall short and what might be done to bridge the gap.”

“I realized it was a privilege to have been invited to give input,” Mary says. “It gave me an opportunity to discuss what caregivers do. The main emphasis of the workshop was the input given by the seven caregivers, and I think most people don’t go to the bottom rung to get information, they go to the top level but they don’t know what goes on at the bottom level.”

“This workshop gave me hope for the future,” Mary adds, “because it concentrated on the caregivers and what their role is and how this information can be used to assist the role of the caregiver and further help the person cared for.”

Mary says she appreciated the fact that instead of a keynote address, she and her fellow care partners each offered their individual stories for consideration at the beginning of the event.

“Each story was different,” she says, “all very moving and touching and very powerful.”

The individual nature of each care partner’s experience is of critical importance when technologies are being designed and enhanced, and the authentic experience each care partner offered opened the space and scope for knowledge exchange that all in attendance learned from.

This isn’t to say that in three short days, a ground-breaking innovation emerged, but this was never the point. The intent was to inspire researchers and designers to think differently, considering the care partner’s perspective, when creating new innovations or enhancements.
RIA Welcomes New Schlegel Research Chair in Mobility and Aging

When an older adult falls it can result in a bone fracture, impacting many aspects of their life. The latest Schlegel Research Chair to join the RIA team will focus on preventing such fractures, and supporting recovery when they do happen, with the most basic of tools available: exercise.

Dr. Lora Giangregorio’s research examines how we can improve mobility and reduce fracture risk, with a special focus on physical activity and exercise. She joins the team as Schlegel Research Chair in Mobility and Aging, and offered her first public lecture in her new role at the Centre of Excellence for Innovation in Aging on Sept. 13.

Titled Staying Fit, Strong and Mobile in Later Life, the seminar explained that although every person will experience some decline in gait and mobility as they age, research suggests they can reduce falls, prevent muscle and bone loss, and remain fit by setting reachable goals in a regular exercise regimen.

Dr. Giangregorio shared the example of “The Iron Nun”, who began running in her late 40s at the suggestion of a priest who thought the time might be good for reflection. Now at 86, she has completed 360 triathlons, 45 Ironman competitions and is the oldest person to ever finish an Ironman Triathlon in less than 17 hours. Dr. Giangregorio also spoke of Yuichiro Miura, the oldest man to reach the summit of Mount Everest, who said simply that to achieve any goal, “you need a target, however big or small, and to build your health and fitness toward it.”

However, her seminar wasn’t suggesting people must run a triathlon or scale the tallest of mountains to maintain their health; only that goals and plans are a key component of progress.

“Have a goal for yourself and a plan,” Dr. Giangregorio says. “That goal could be related to an activity you want to eventually be able to do.”

“What is a new challenge that you’re going to set up for yourself?” she asked audience members. It might be an ultra-marathon or it could be as simple as being able to walk for 10 minutes without getting out of breath. Some of Dr. Giangregorio’s research focuses on evaluating exercise programs, and helping older people and health care providers use the research findings in the real world. Regardless of what research targets she and her team set, translating the findings in a tangible, meaningful way to benefit others is a key priority.

She joins a team of eight other Schlegel Chairs who share the same person-centred philosophy, and her work will be a direct complement to the wide range of research projects currently underway at RIA.

Better tArgeting, Better outcomes for frail ELderly (BABEL)

A team of Canadian researchers, including Schlegel Research Chairs Dr. George Heckman, Dr. Andrew Costa, Dr. Veronique Boscart, and Dr. Heather Keller, have recently received nearly $3M in funding from the Canadian Frailty Network to explore opportunities to better assess and support older adults across the continuum of care.

The purpose of this project, called BABEL, is to leverage existing information and care delivery infrastructures to better identify older adults at risk and deliver targeted and risk-appropriate care.

This will not only result in better care and improved quality of life, but more efficient use of health care resources. One arm of the project will identify and address best practices in Advance Care Planning (ACP) in long-term care. Previous research has suggested benefits of ACP on resident satisfaction with care and health resource utilization, but it is a complex process. Using consultations with long-term care residents and stakeholders, the research team will gain a better understanding of knowledge translation practices to ensure that advance care wishes are respected.

Stay tuned as this exciting project gets rolling!
Ontario CLRIIs to Continue Quest for Quality Improvement in LTC

Written by Kristian Partington

The pursuit of innovation within the long-term care sector received a significant boost in August. Ontario’s Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care announced base funding to continue to support three Ontario Centres for Learning, Research and Innovation in Long-Term Care (CLRI).

Alongside Baycrest Health Sciences and Bruyère Research Institute, the Schlegel-UW Research Institute for Aging (RIA) will act as host to the second incarnation of the CLRI. The three organizations will work in tandem to advance quality of life and care across the sector through innovative education, research, and knowledge exchange.

A priority for the next phase of CLRI is to expand its reach across Ontario, including smaller, rural and Northern long-term care homes. “We want to make sure that we are engaging with long-term care homes from all corners of the province,” says Tammy Cumming, the new Manager of the Schlegel CLRI, “and hearing what their needs are.”

Plans are in place to develop a provincial advisory committee, where a variety of stakeholders from across the sector will be asked to weigh in on CLRI priorities. These groups, Tammy says, “will offer advice and guidance” on some of the initiatives the CLRI will take on in the coming years.

Over the next few months, the Schlegel CLRI will connect existing care providers to ongoing education through the Excellence in Resident-Centered Care course, a partnership with Conestoga College. Ontario homes can apply to receive tuition and backfill funding for personal support workers to take advantage of this continuing education opportunity.

The Schlegel CLRI will also develop and promote webinars on best practices to advance quality of care and life for residents in long-term care. Hot topics such as nutrition, falls prevention, and living with dementia are being explored to kick off the webinar series.

“The whole purpose of the CLRI is to improve or advance quality outcomes and quality of life in long-term care,” Tammy explains. “There’s a unique opportunity for the CLRI to learn about and share innovations that are already making a difference, while driving the exploration and development of promising new programs and practices.”

The CLRI host organizations offer significant expertise in various aspects of aging research and innovation. Threading that knowledge together and ensuring it flows to the care providers who have a direct impact in the lives of Ontario’s 77,541 long-term care residents is the ultimate goal of the CLRI.

NEW: Education Fund for Personal Support Workers in Long-Term Care

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has launched a new education fund in collaboration with the Ontario Centres for Learning, Research and Innovation in Long-Term Care and Conestoga College. Ontario long-term care homes can now apply for tuition and backfill funding to train Personal Support Workers (PSW) in Excellence in Resident-Centred Care (ERCC) courses.

Up until March 31, 2018, long-term care homes have the opportunity to train all PSWs working in their home on practical, person-centred approaches to care that may improve quality of care for residents. The train-the-trainer approach allows homes to build capacity for ongoing learning and provides opportunities for training for 2 years.

Apply now at www.pswfundltc.ca.

This initiative is funded by the Government of Ontario to the Ontario Centres for Learning, Research and Innovation in Long-Term Care.
Welcome new team members!

RIA is pleased to welcome three new members to our growing team. Please join us in welcoming Michelle, Tammy and Kyla to the RIA family!

Michelle Grouchy  
Senior Director of Operations  
Tammy Cumming  
Manager, Schlegel Centre for Learning, Research, and Innovation in Long-Term Care  
Kyla English Leis  
Assistant Research Coordinator

Interested in joining the RIA team?

Visit our website to see current job postings (www.the-ria.ca/jobs) or follow RIA’s LinkedIn page for the latest updates (www.linkedin.com/company/schlegel-uwaterloo-research-institute-for-aging).

Schlegel-UW Research Institute for Aging

Our Vision: To be one of the top 5 innovation institutes for aging in the world.

Our Mission: To enhance the quality of life and care of older adults through partnerships in research, education and practice.

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