Dementia Research
Expanding at the RIA

Written by Kristian Partington

The RIA team of researchers has grown once again with the addition of Carrie McAiney as the new Schlegel Research Chair in Dementia. Carrie brings to her new role more than 20 years experience working alongside people living with dementia and their care partners. Over the past two decades, she’s watched our understanding of dementia change and she says it’s an exciting time to join a team at the forefront of this evolution.

“I really respect the philosophy of Schlegel Villages and the RIA,” Carrie says, noting that she already has strong connections with team members in the villages and several RIA Research Chairs. “It’s like coming home,” she says.

While many researchers in Canada are looking at prevention or a cure for dementia, Carrie’s works focuses on ‘help for today’. She is finding ways to better support those living with dementia and their care partners. Her work also challenges the way people view dementia and the stigma that surrounds the diagnosis.

“I hope that the research that I and the other Schlegel Research Chairs conduct will help to shift the often negative perceptions of people living with dementia and their abilities,” says Carrie McAiney.

Continued on next page...
Dr. McAiney. “We as a society need to gain understanding and a sincere appreciation for the important and outstanding contributions individuals living with dementia make in their communities.”

She will work closely with Dr. Allen Power, who joined the RIA last year as Schlegel Chair in Aging and Dementia Innovation. Both are passionate about changing the culture of aging and care, particularly as it relates to dementia. They will pool their expertise to evaluate some of the new practices being trialed in long-term care and retirement living that focus on well-being for those living with dementia. Carrie will also examine the benefits for residents, care partners, and team members in long-term care when support is consistently provided by the same few team members.

To mark the beginning of her new role, Carrie offered a public lecture discussing the importance of collaboration to enhance dementia care. By working together with the community, researchers can determine the right questions to ask and also the best ways to share results and make a difference.

Carrie says it’s important to work closely with people living with dementia and their care partners, as well as with organizations and advocacy groups such as Alzheimer’s Societies, to determine what research needs to be done.

“I’ve got my own area of expertise but I don’t have expertise in really understanding the day-to-day life in a long-term care setting or a retirement home or a person living in the community,” she says. “Working collaboratively you can understand what the really important questions are that need to be asked.”

And that collaborative approach ties in perfectly with the expanding network of researchers and experts the RIA has been drawing together for the past number of years.

“I get to see that coming together of a group of individuals, of researchers, each with unique areas of expertise and a common interest in improving the lives of our seniors,” Carrie says. “To have that collection of people together is exciting; you don’t see that in many places.”