MAREP Joins the RIA Family

The Murray Alzheimer Research and Education Program (MAREP) has recently moved its home base from the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences at the University of Waterloo to the RIA.

Since 1993, MAREP has been a global leader in transforming leading-edge research into practical tools. When the RIA was founded 12 years later with a mandate to enhance the lives of older adults through research and innovation, collaboration between the two organizations made perfect sense.

MAREP founder Ken Murray, who was the primary care partner for his late wife Helen on her journey with Alzheimer’s disease, is pleased about the program’s future. “RIA is ideally suited to propel MAREP forward,” said Murray. “To be able to integrate the work of MAREP with other research and educational initiatives at the RIA will have such a positive impact on people’s lives.”

Over the past few years, the RIA research team has grown to include a special focus on dementia. The addition of MAREP will complement this work as the RIA continues to develop programs, education and resources to benefit those living with dementia and their care partners.

“MAREP has a long history of success, not only in how it approaches the philosophy of care – ensuring collaboration with all relevant stakeholders, including people living with dementia and their families – but also in the many resources it makes available for the public to use.”

Stolee added that the move to the RIA will allow for more interdisciplinary research and support for MAREP’s key projects, including the award-winning LIVING the Dementia Journey education program.

“A cornerstone philosophy of both organizations is a recognition that people living with dementia and their loved ones must be authentic partners in both research and the development of practical educational materials. “There is opportunity in this collaboration for people living with dementia and their families to not only benefit from MAREP’s tools and resources,” says Josie, “but also get involved as key stakeholders and contribute to new research that will improve dementia care.”
Advancing Education for Seniors Care with $2M Funding Renewal

Over $2M has been committed to advancing innovative education and training for seniors care in Canada, and Kitchener-Waterloo is at the hub of this work. The funding was awarded to Conestoga College to renew a five-year, multi-industry partnership.

With an aging population and increasing pressure on the health care system, the need for a highly skilled workforce has never been greater. “As our older adult population grows and the complexities of care increase, specialized training is a priority,” says Josie d’Avernas, executive director at the RIA. “This unique partnership and funding commitment will enable us to explore new training solutions and better prepare current and future health care professionals.”

Dr. Veronique Boscart’s Chair position, jointly held at Conestoga and the RIA, has been renewed, and a new faculty position at the college has also been added to further grow this initiative. Linda Sheiban Taucar, a registered nurse and researcher with a specialization in geriatrics, has been appointed the Schlegel Associate Research Chair for Seniors Care and will join RIA’s team of Schlegel Specialists (learn more about Linda on the back page). In addition to developing education and professional development opportunities for the senior care sector, Dr. Boscart and her team will advance research on best practices and effective care models.

In addition to Conestoga College and the RIA, partners in this work include Schlegel Villages, Essity, PointClickCare and Health eTraining International. Matched funding was provided by the Natural Sciences Engineering Research Council of Canada and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

The continuation and growth of this partnership and Dr. Boscart’s Chair position will put needed focus on education in seniors care. The impact will be felt by both health professionals and the older adults they support.

Have you seen our new website?

Fully redesigned to enhance usability, the site features news, updates on current research projects, details about upcoming events, and resources designed to help enhance quality of life for older adults across care settings. Easily searchable by topic or audience, there are a variety of resources to explore. Visit the new site today at www.the-ria.ca.

Congratulations to Dr. Heather Keller

This fall, Schlegel Research Chair Dr. Heather Keller was named a Fellow of the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences (CAHS). Being recognized as a Fellow is considered one of the highest honours within Canada’s academic community, and awardees are selected based on their internationally recognized leadership, academic performance, scientific creativity and willingness to serve.

Congratulations to Dr. Keller on receiving this honour!
Intergenerational Initiative Helps Raise Awareness of Career Opportunities in Senior Living Sector

With Canada’s aging population, the demand for care services and senior living options continues to rise. Yet many long-term care and retirement home providers are struggling to fill positions and attract new hires. Intergenerational programs offer an exciting opportunity for youth to experience the many benefits of working with older adults.

A new intergenerational initiative is being led by the RIA in partnership with the Ontario Centres for Learning, Research and Innovation in Long-Term Care (Ontario CLRI). The goal of this work is to encourage partnerships between secondary schools and long-term care and retirement living.

Secondary schools are always looking for meaningful co-operative (co-op) and volunteer placements for their students, while long-term care and retirement homes are regularly in need of volunteers. With the breadth of roles available, from care to recreation to accounting, students have the opportunity to gain valuable experience and learn first-hand the benefits of a career in senior living.

These efforts also serve to change the often-negative public perception of life and work in long-term care and retirement homes. Younger generations get a chance to see how vibrant these communities truly are, and build relationships with a generation they may not otherwise connect with.

The RIA hosted a think tank on November 2, 2018, bringing together researchers and stakeholders from across the long-term care, retirement living and education sectors to share their learnings on intergenerational initiatives and discuss how to build and maintain partnerships. Educators, students, team members from long-term care and retirement homes, residents and family members were among the participants contributing their thoughts and ideas.

The findings will be packaged into a toolkit made available by the Ontario CLRI to support secondary schools and long-term care and retirement homes in developing their own intergenerational initiatives. This toolkit will be made freely available in 2019.

Quality Care Webinar Series Available Online

The Ontario Centres for Learning, Research and Innovation in Long-Term Care (CLRI) at the RIA hosts a webinar series to share best practices with long-term care homes across the province. Each webinar features a different key topic, and shares new knowledge and strategies to improve the quality of care and life in long-term care. Schlegel Research Chairs Dr. George Heckman and Dr. Heather Keller have both been featured in the series. Dr. Heckman spoke to advancements in chronic disease management, and Dr. Keller shared her research on the importance of mealtimes and new CHOICE+ tools and resources that long-term care teams can start using to make change.

Recordings of these webinars are available on the Ontario CLRI website at www.clri-ltc.ca/webinars.
Exploring Intimacy in Long-Term Care

Written by Kristian Partington

Innovation pushes the boundaries of the status quo and inspires people to find creative solutions. The plenary session at the 4th annual RIA/Schlegel Villages Innovation Summit did just that. Lori Schindel Martin, nurse and researcher at Ryerson University, spoke about intimacy and sexuality in long-term care.

Lori’s presentation was at times uncomfortable. She encouraged all 200 attendees to challenge their understandings and biases of human sexuality and intimacy among older adults, especially those living with dementia. For most of our lives, human connection, friendship, and intimate expressions are a normal part of life, yet they tend to be the cause of controversy in long-term care settings.

She was clear at the outset to say she was not approaching the topic from a legal perspective, but instead through the lens of a clinician with lived experience. Lori wants to end the stigma that surrounds the issue, but she understands the challenges.

In Ontario today, Lori says conflict exists between what it means to provide person-centred care and how these principles apply to the notion of intimate expressions. Lori also highlighted that there are no clear definitions of the different types of intimate expressions to help distinguish between sexual touch and normal social touch. This normal social touch, like hand holding or a gentle embrace, she says, “must be part of what it means to be human, interacting in a social environment with people we feel we belong with.”

Ultimately, if a true community is created within a long-term care home where relationships are encouraged to bloom, then it is inevitable that desire for intimacy between residents will emerge. This is human nature, and such relationships are needed in order for all people to flourish, including older adults living with dementia. Unfortunately, long-term care environments often encourage loneliness because of the fear that expressions of friendship will be misinterpreted. Lori called for new or more defined policies in addition to clinical decision-making tools to support team members in long-term care to better understand expressions of friendship and social connection.

Lori posed one final question: how can we encourage social connection and be accepting of safe intimacy in long-term care and for those living with dementia? She acknowledged that there are many complexities, but she urged the crowd to think differently as they continue to re-examine this topic and be open to innovation. Because there is so much to gain. Lori sees the “rich potential for flourishing as a result of new relationships that develop between co-residents in long-term care homes.”

Welcome new team members!

The RIA team has recruited two more members! Please join us in welcoming Paul St. Pierre (Accountant) and Kelly McGuire (Communications Officer) to the team.
Food Service Students Explore Career Paths in Long-Term Care

Over the next decade, an additional 30,000 Ontarians will make their home in long-term care (LTC), representing a significant increase in necessary care and support for this aging population. LTC providers must now figure out how to meet the growing demand for skilled team members in a sector already spread thin.

A recent education day hosted by RIA’s Ontario Centre for Learning, Research and Innovation in Long-Term Care (Ontario CLRI) focused on the importance of nutrition and mealtime experience in the life quality of LTC residents. Food Service Worker Day brought 15 students from Conestoga College’s Food Service Worker Program to the RIA to hear from registered dietitians, leading researchers in nutrition and aging, food suppliers and LTC residents. The students heard about the important role food services team members play in the lives of residents, and toured the kitchen and serveries in the neighbouring Village at University Gates to see first-hand what the job is really like.

“It’s well known that the LTC sector is in need of employees at all levels,” says RIA project coordinator Holly Hebner, who helped organize the event after Conestoga College instructor Anne Avery contacted the RIA. Anne shared with Holly that she commonly fields calls from LTC providers seeking graduates to hire, but few students understand the opportunities that exist in the field.

Unfortunately, a stereotypical view permeates the minds of many students, Holly says, “and there is definitely a stigma around working in LTC. It’s so great to have an opportunity like this so we can challenge that stigma and change some perspectives, which I definitely think we achieved.”

Dr. Heather Keller, Schlegel Research Chair in Nutrition and Aging, discussed the connection between a positive mealtime experience and optimal nutritional health among LTC residents. Team members from University Gates were also there to share what they love most about working in the Village – the relationships they build with residents and the opportunity to explore their creativity during special events.

“Food service workers have a voice in how things run in the kitchen,” Holly says. “They are responsible for making sure residents are receiving the nutrition they need and they are also able to say ‘let’s make some changes so our residents can have a positive mealtime experience and create that sense of home.’ ”

The Ontario CLRI at the RIA was happy to offer students a glimpse of potential careers in a field hungry for new recruits, and Holly says she’s hopeful students of food services programs at other post-secondary institutions can find the same opportunities to discover that LTC is a truly rewarding sector to be a part of.

Join us to welcome MAREP!

Join us November 20 to welcome the Murray Alzheimer Research and Education Program (MAREP) to the RIA family. We’ll be honouring MAREP’s 25 years of dedication to improving dementia care, and celebrating 15 years of “By Us For Us” Guides. These practical resources were created by people living with dementia for people living with dementia, and a new guide on Young Onset Dementia will be launched at the event. Copies of past issues will also be available. Learn more on our website at www.the-ria.ca.
Linda is the newly appointed Schlegel Associate Research Chair in Seniors Care at Conestoga College, and a Schlegel Specialist with the RIA. She began her research career by completing a Masters degree in Health Studies and Gerontology at the University of Waterloo. Her thesis work explored the experiences of health care providers who care for those with dementia in primary care memory clinics.

Following her Masters degree, Linda started a position as Research Coordinator at Conestoga College under the supervision of Dr. Veronique Boscart. During her time as Research Coordinator, Linda pursued her Bachelor of Science in Nursing and became a Registered Nurse.

Linda now uses her joint clinical and research knowledge in her new position. Her research focuses on improving care practices based on the latest evidence and on developing education with a gerontology focus.

Linda also serves as the Editorial Assistant for the Social Policy and Practice Section Editor at the Canadian Journal on Aging.

To learn more about Linda’s new role, visit our website at www.the-ria.ca.