Heart failure awareness can make the difference

by Kristian Partington

When team members in long-term care combine their personal knowledge of the residents they serve with specialized training through the RIA’s Core Heart Team initiative, a great opportunity to enhance quality of life emerges.

This unique initiative, which has continued to grow over the past few years, is focused on better management of heart failure among long-term care residents. Led by Dr. George Heckman, Schlegel Research Chair in Geriatric Medicine with the RIA, the project provides all team members, from personal support workers to registered practical nurses and housekeepers, with the knowledge they need to identify the early signs of heart failure and support the management of the condition after diagnosis.

At The Village of Winston Park, the benefits of the Core Heart Team directly impacted a resident who lived in the village for nearly three years. As with all residents, the team grew to know this gentleman well. They knew his family was the greatest source of his pride. They knew his love of music was matched only by his love of baseball and hockey, and they knew something wasn’t right with him in the early days of 2018 when the early signs of heart failure began to surface.

Rabina Simovic, director of long-term care at Winston Park, says at this time approximately 90 team members had participated in training seminars with Heckman. Thanks to this knowledge, they picked up on the resident’s changing health quickly.

The first signs were a shortness of breath and PSWs were the first to notice his swollen ankles. He began to lose his balance often and it wasn’t long before he needed a wheelchair for mobility because he could no longer walk safely on his own. The team quickly suggested heart failure might be at the root of their concerns.

“Dr. George Heckman

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“We started looking at his medications and we (spoke to) Heckman and he made some recommendations,” Simovic says. The team also worked closely with the Village’s regular physician, monitoring this resident’s progress as his medications were adjusted.

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WWW.THE-RIA.CA
The founder of Murray Alzheimer Research and Education Program (MAREP) and former RIA board member Kenneth “Ken” Murray, died on Saturday, March 2, 2019 at the age of 94.

“We are deeply saddened by the loss of a true gentleman and extend our condolences to the family,” says Ron Schlegel, Chairman of the Board and RIA Founder. “I have known Ken for over 30 years and have been inspired by his unwavering commitment to Alzheimer awareness, healthy aging and making a difference so that others can live well and fully as they age.”

Murray founded MAREP in 1993 after his experience as a care partner for his first wife Helen inspired him to support a research and education initiative that improves the quality of life for individuals with Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias. In fall 2018, Murray helped move MAREP from its first home in the Faculty of Applied Sciences at the University of Waterloo to its current home at the RIA.

Based on the Working Together to Put Living First guidebook, the case study outlines the collaborative, strengths-based journey that began in 2009 and has changed the way people across the Schlegel Villages organization speak, act and relate to each other – creating a culture that values older adults by providing choice, meaning and purpose.

Josie d’Avernas, RIA’s executive director, says this is a great way to spread the word about culture change. “We are thrilled that HealthCareCAN approached us to use our culture change learnings in this course. It’s a great opportunity for us to share our knowledge across the national health-care sector.”

The RIA case study was launched as part of the course on April 1, 2019.
Vascular Echo takes aging research to space

by Kristian Partington

For almost 6 ½ months, Canadian astronaut David Saint-Jacques has orbited Earth aboard the International Space Station (ISS). Among other tasks, he has operated the Canadian-built robotic arm known as Canadarm2, tested new technologies and conducted and contributed to extensive experiments focused on the human aging process.

Working with the RIA’s Professor Richard Hughson, Schlegel Research Chair in Vascular Aging and Brain Health, Saint-Jacques’ contribution will build upon past work exploring how space travel affects and, in some ways, mimics the natural aging process. As people age, arteries tend to stiffen and affect blood flow, which can interfere with movement and cognition, or lead to stroke and heart disease.

During their relatively short time in space, Saint-Jacques and his fellow astronauts are likely to experience many of the same symptoms. “We’ve learned that astronauts’ arteries get stiffer with six months spaceflight by the same amount as aging 20 years,” says Hughson.

“We hope to gain a better understanding of why an astronaut’s arteries get stiffer in space,” he says, “and to use this information to help all of us here on Earth to keep our arteries young and elastic for as long as possible.”

Hughson and his team at the RIA will compare data collected from astronauts on the ISS with older adults to study how this hardening process occurs. In doing so, the team hopes to identify a means of slowing down or even reversing this process, thus reducing the risk of the serious complications that can follow.

Hughson has already worked with several astronauts, most notably Col. Chris Hadfield, the Canadian commander of the ISS who orbited 400 km above earth for 146 days in 2012-13. While his music videos, photos and tweets garnered international attention, Hadfield also helped shine a light on the scientific importance of space travel through the study, Vascular. Saint-Jacques will help keep this momentum going, contributing to that foundation of knowledge through Vascular Echo, the expanded study that Hughson and his team are now focused on.

The RIA lab in Waterloo is currently linked to the ISS so the team can monitor Saint-Jacques by video as he conducts the Vascular Echo experiments. The team will also follow his recovery up to a year after spaceflight.

Hughson says the crucial role of exercise in maintaining a healthy lifestyle is clearly seen through his work with astronauts, and even without the results of his latest study in hand, he knows people can age healthier if they exercise more.

“We are learning that the single session of exercise astronauts do every day does not overcome the extreme physical inactivity of floating in space for 22 hours per day,” Hughson says. “This should tell us here on Earth that it is really important to move more.”

Canadian astronaut David Saint-Jacques (right) with RIA’s Richard Hughson (left) and wife Nadia.
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“The whole team was involved,” Simovic says. Everyone monitored his breathing, sleeping patterns, the swelling in his ankles and his emotional well-being. “The whole process took about two months,” she says, “and then suddenly one day he was sitting on Main Street upon a couch and he just stood up and started pushing a chair like a walker.”

For two months he’d been unable to walk or use the washroom on his own; then one day he just stood up and walked. Kinesiologist Ray Bolton quickly assessed this gentleman and said he was fine to walk independently with the assistance of a walker. “He pretty much went back to where he was before,” Simovic says. “He was happier and he really had a good quality of life.”

Merry Snider, a PSW who was close with this gentleman ever since he moved in, saw the happiness in his eyes return. He hated the fact that people had to help him, Snider says, and the team’s assessment and efforts helped him regain his independence up until his passing.

As the Core Heart Team initiative continues to gain traction, Heckman’s research continues. The research team is exploring the many benefits of the program, for both residents and team members, and how best to spread this team approach to care to more and more homes.

RIA products featured in provincial education and training resource

Two RIA products have been included in a province-wide resource for people who work with older adults who live with dementia, mental health, substance use and/or other neurological conditions. Behavioural Supports Ontario (BSO) recently released the Behavioural Education and Training Supports Inventory (BETSI) 2.0 which includes LIVING the Dementia Journey (LDJ) as a featured program and Excellence in Residence Centred Care (ERCC) as an additional resource.

LDJ is an award-winning, evidence-informed training program for those who support people living with dementia. The program was created in collaboration with people living with dementia and their care partners, and provides a fresh perspective on dementia care and support based on real life experiences. LDJ emphasizes the importance of shifting care and services to focus on a person’s strengths and abilities, and how each person can be supported in living life to the fullest.

ERCC courses build practical skills using a person-centred approach. The courses are designed for personal support workers and other team members in seniors care. ERCC covers a number of key topics including palliative care, safety and mobility, continence, infection prevention and control, oral care, nutrition and hydration, and pain and comfort.

The BETSI tool is used by organizations in Ontario that are looking for resources to support their staff who work with older adults living with dementia.

Welcome new team members

We’d like to welcome Sian Lockwood (Project Officer), Liz Snyder (Interim Director of Communications), Jennifer Hartwick (Director of Strategic Projects) and Nathan Honsberger (Project Officer) to the team.
The newest Living Classroom opens in Hamilton

Schlegel Villages, the RIA and Mohawk College have partnered to open a third Living Classroom at The Village of Wentworth Heights in Hamilton.

In this new location, Mohawk College students enrolled in the personal support worker program have access to a classroom, computer lab, skills lab, faculty offices, a student lounge and a mock apartment identical to those at the long-term care home where the classroom is embedded. They will also work directly within the Wentworth Heights community right from the start, getting hands-on experience with residents and team members.

The Living Classroom was developed as an innovative educational experience to encourage students to pursue a career path working with older adults. Living Classroom graduates are often better prepared to support the changing needs of the aging population, building workforce capacity in the senior living sector. This model of experiential learning was first developed in partnership with the RIA and Conestoga College.

Crystal Lee, a student enrolled in the Mohawk program is excited by the opportunities the Living Classroom offers. “It means a lot to be in the Village because this is what I want to do, this is my calling. With this experience I think there is a better chance for me to get a job right out of the program.”

At the opening on January 31, 2019, James Schlegel, President of Schlegel Villages, talked about the Living Classroom program as an opportunity for learners to be integrated right into the village to enhance their learning experience and enhance the lives of residents as well.

“For the Living Classroom creates a rich learning experience for students and encourages Wentworth Heights residents and team members to be part of the learning environment as coaches and mentors thus bringing more meaning to their lives and work respectively – a true triple win!”

The Wentworth Heights program is the third Living Classroom to open. The first opened at the Village of Riverside Glen (Guelph, Ontario) in 2009 and the second at The Village of University Gates (Waterloo, Ontario) in 2015.

For more information about the Living Classroom, visit: www.livingclassroom.ca.

Dementia-inclusive exercise the focus of latest RIA think tank

On May 10, 2019, RIA research scientist Professor Laura Middleton brought researchers, people with lived-experience, care partners, exercise providers and community members together to co-develop tools for a Dementia-Inclusive Choices for Exercise (DICE) toolkit, at a think tank hosted by the RIA. The DICE toolkit aims to expand the exercise and recreational programs available to people living with dementia by increasing the ability of exercise providers to engage with, include, and support people living with dementia in existing exercise programs, and by connecting people living with dementia to suitable programs and providers.
Veronique Boscart accepts new position at Conestoga College

Congratulations to Professor Veronique Boscart, CIHR/Schlegel Industrial Research Chair for Colleges (IRCC) in Seniors Care, as she has accepted a new role as Executive Dean, School of Health & Life Sciences at Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning.

A clinical nurse by trade, this new role will give Boscart the opportunity to influence curriculum, preparing students for the real-life experiences ahead.

Boscart will continue in her existing roles of Director, Schlegel Centre for Advancing Seniors Care at Conestoga College and CIHR/Schlegel Industrial Research Chair for Colleges in Seniors Care.

She is also president of the Canadian Association in Gerontology and the Immediate Past President of the Canadian Gerontological Nursing Association. As well, Boscart holds an Assistant Clinical Professor position with the School of Nursing at McMaster University, an Adjunct Assistant Professor position at the School of Public Health and Health Systems at the University of Waterloo, and an Adjunct Scientist position at iDAPT (Intelligent Design for Adaptation, Participation and Technology) at Toronto Rehab, University Health Network. She has published over seventy peer reviewed manuscripts, and is the lead author on the first and second Canadian edition of Gerontological Nursing and Healthy Aging (2011, 2018).

We are so proud to have Veronique Boscart as a member of the RIA team!