

BEYOND SNOEZELLEN

You've got the equipment, now how do you launch the program?

Among the black lights, bubble tubes, glowing fibre optics and soft music, the last person you'd expect to see is 87-year-old Edith Lynch. Yet here she is, along with music therapist Sheilah Craven, participating in a combined music therapy and sensory-stimulation session.

In the quest for continuous improvement in the quality of life for residents, a wide variety of creative recreational programming exists. Applied therapeutically, these programs go beyond quality of life to assist with maintaining or improving functional abilities. One of the most flamboyant of these is the collection of sensory stimulation tools often jointly referred to as Snoezelen.

The Bloorview Macmillan Centre for Children in Toronto was the first facility in North America to implement the novel program, introduced to Canada in 1992. Today, Snoezelen appears in more than 200 sites nationwide. Though a growing number of professionals and long term care facilities know of Snoezelen and recognize its value, there is relatively little information on how to launch a successful Snoezelen program once the equipment arrives. Moreover, even less help exists on how to implement a Snoezelen program for seniors. Among more than 50 presentations included in the 3rd Snoezelen World Conference of 1999, not one focused on seniors.

by Brian O'Grady

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Jennifer Raftis is the Snoezelen coordinator at Carlingview Manor, an Ottawa-based long term care facility. Eight months since its inception, Ms. Raftis' Snoezelen program includes a dedicated Snoezelen room and a mobile Snoezelen cart for residents with mobility impairments. The results generated by the Snoezelen program have attracted media attention, including three televised interviews and a newspaper article. Asked about the key to the program's success at Carlingview, Ms. Raftis identified several elements that helped get it off the ground.

"As well as knowing your residents really well, training or previous experience with Snoezelen is important. I'm lucky to have held a previous position where I learned how to work with residents in Snoezelen and how to identify their reactions. It's difficult for someone who's new to Snoezelen to just turn on the equipment and understand how to interact with a resident or know what to watch for. That can make it difficult to spot and record outcomes."

The first step in building Carlingview Manor's program was to create a documented process that could be read, understood and passed on. A vital part of this documentation is a doctor referral system.



Carlingview resident Edith Lynch enjoys a "Snoez-ic" program with music therapist Sheilah Craven.

"Often the nursing staff have the most contact with residents and therefore know them best," says Ms. Raftis. "With that in mind, everyone has access to referral forms I keep at the nursing stations. They submit these forms to me for those residents they think will benefit most. Once I receive a referral, the appropriate doctor and

Program Launch Checklist

1. Training or experience important for program owner.
2. Document the process.
3. Include a referral system.
4. Present program to management, staff, families and residents.
5. Highlight how the program benefits other staff.
6. Have a "staff day" for co-workers to participate in the program.
7. Hold an open house for guests. The referral process, along with an introductory presentation to staff, management, families and residents, will ensure that everyone feels a part of the process. Carlingview Manor held a "staff day" for employees to explore the Snoezelen room and learn how the program works.

Snoezelen coordinator Jen Raftis with some of the equipment from Carlingview Manor's Snoezelen program.



family members also sign off so the whole care team knows Snoezelen is part of that resident's programming."

Ms. Raftis recalls, "When the nurses learned they could turn to Snoezelen to reduce a resident's anxiety or agitation, the program gained a lot of support." An open house to introduce Snoezelen to residents' families and the community was also well received.



Nurses Linda MacDonald (left) and Darlene Mason explore the Snoezelen room during Staff Day.

Interestingly, a secondary benefit of Snoezelen is improved care for residents who are not receiving Snoezelen. "Those who are consistently aggressive or anxious as a symptom of dementia consume a lot of attention. With Snoezelen, we can usually redirect behaviours and help these residents relax. In addition to the obvious benefit for the individual, the other residents enjoy increased attention from the nursing staff."

Sue Burnell-Jones, clinical coordinator and nurse educator at Carlingview Manor, agrees: "When Snoezelen helps with challenging behaviours it creates a better environment for everyone and reduces the stress on our nurses. That's good for nursing but ultimately it's the residents who benefit."

With the Snoezelen program up and running, Ms. Raftis and the recreation team began looking for ways to

augment it. The search resulted in cooperative programming in areas such as physiotherapy and music therapy. Information exists suggesting that pain management can help residents during physiotherapy—another benefit of Snoezelen.

Music therapist Sheilah Craven is happy with the results of her "Snoezic" groups—Carlingview's name for combined music therapy and Snoezelen sessions. "The Snoezelen equipment enhances music therapy by increasing attention span and awareness and giving the residents something tangible to concentrate on for the duration of a musical activity."

Residents at Carlingview also enjoy Snoezelen sessions with visiting family members. Activities such as aroma therapy, hand massages or nostalgic music provide focal points for a visit and are beneficial for everyone. For family members of residents with

advanced disabilities, seeing a loved one relaxed, happy and responsive to external stimuli is a heart-warming experience.

On a practical level, group activities maximize equipment use while helping the greatest number of people. With a caseload of more than 100 residents, Ms. Raftis finds it difficult to see everyone as often as she'd like.

"Cooperative programming offers positive outcomes and it's a good way to see as many residents as possible. And the presence of another staff member helps to maintain a low resident-to-caregiver ratio."

Today, eight months after the launch of Carlingview Manor's Snoezelen program, Ms. Raftis still sees room for development. Two items at the top of her agenda are expanding Snoezelen training to the rest of the recreation team and increasing the role of family and volunteers in the program. Training additional staff is a natural step when there is both a Snoezelen room and a Snoezelen cart.

Program Expansion Checklist

1. Explore multi-disciplinary approaches.
2. Involve family members whenever possible.
3. Conduct small group sessions.
4. Train other staff members.
5. Maximize programming through volunteers.

Ideally, the two would operate independently so while the room is in use, the cart can roll out for sessions with residents who have mobility impairments or those in palliative care.

Ms. Raftis also points to an expanding role for volunteers in the Snoezelen program: "In a group situation, a volunteer with Snoezelen training can really enhance a session. In one-on-one situations, volunteers would be a big help during transfers."

Program statistics support this idea. In an average day of one-on-one programming, Ms. Raftis sees between eight and 15 residents, with half her day spent in transfers to and from the Snoezelen room. Using volunteers to assist with transfers, Ms. Raftis predicts she could nearly double those numbers.

In the short time since Carlingview Manor's Snoezelen program began, it has become an important part of the recreation activity calendar. Careful tracking of resident outcomes should provide sufficient data to justify the continuation of Snoezelen and encourage the adoption of more programming that enhances the quality of life for residents. During a recent Snoezelen session, resident Edith Lynch said she'd "love to stay in [the Snoezelen room] all day!" Comments like these, combined with a steadily growing list of referrals, testify to the success of Snoezelen at Carlingview Manor. LTC



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