



March, 2019

Proposal for Change - Supporting Residents in Care

Vancouver Island Association of Family Councils

The Vancouver Island Association of Family Councils (VIAFC) is a network of individual Family Councils from residential care facilities throughout the Island Health Authority area. Our goal is to “enhance the quality of life of residents and to provide a voice in decisions within the facilities that affect them.” (BC Guidelines for the Development of Resident or Family Councils). Please see Addendum 1 for more information about our specific goals.

VIAFC is fortunate to enjoy a very healthy, productive relationship with Island Health, culminating most recently in the joint creation of the “Resident/Family Council, or Family Support Group Guide”. We appreciate their efforts to provide a platform for Family Councils to continue to advocate for those in care.

At a recent VIAFC Annual General Meeting, we worked to identify concerns that were shared by our general membership. Two significant and consistent concerns were identified as serious roadblocks to our efforts:

- Marginalization of Family Councils, and
- Staffing instability

This document addresses concerns about Family Council operation and provides specific recommendations for change.

Background

Family Council Operation

Some of our Family Councils are welcomed by facility management, resulting in partnerships that work hard to enhance the quality of life for residents. In these facilities, residents are benefitting from the willingness of patient-focused managers to listen and provide a voice to their independent Family Councils.

Unfortunately, for other councils, facility administrators still refuse to support or even recognize independent, self-determining Family Councils. Some managers will not speak to representatives of Family Councils who are trying to exercise a collective voice. Some managers refuse to permit organized Family Councils to meet on site. Some managers instruct their staffs not to speak to friends or family members who have been identified as Family Council members. Instead, some managers will have management-led information sessions with only a few family members and call that their “Family Council”, while dismantling a much larger, self-determining Family Council that has followed Ministry of Health and Island Health Guidelines, and is trying to operate independently and in good faith.

Family Council Membership

Another significant problem faced by Family Councils is sustaining membership. Supportive facility managers are now using the intake process to seek permission from families new to a facility to share family contact information with existing Family Councils. In those situations, Family Councils can advertise when they have guest speakers or events that might be of interest to new families, friends or representatives of residents. By being able to connect directly with these contacts, family councils can sustain or expand membership numbers. In those settings, family council meetings and projects are well attended, despite the relentless turnover caused by deaths or relocations of residents.

Unfortunately, other facility managers refuse to advertise anything for Family Councils. They will not direct potential new members toward the Family Council and will not help with announcements about events such as council-arranged guest speakers. Those guest speakers typically range from the Alzheimer’s Society, to recreation consultants, to experts on best practices within long term care, to experts on legal documents such as Representation Agreements, and so on. Families new to residential care also lose the advantage of having Family Councils guide them through the enormous learning curve that accompanies entry into residential care. Lack of management support usually results in diminishing numbers within the Family Council, and certainly limits learning opportunities and support for friends and family who are new to the facility – all at a cost to residents in care.

Conclusions

Some facility managers choose to refuse to provide support and a voice to Family Councils by ignoring Ministry of Health Guidelines that suggest that a Family Council “is a group consisting of persons in care and/or their representatives, family members and contact persons.” Other managers also choose to ignore Island Health’s Guidelines that state that a Family Council is “self-led, self-determined, and democratic.” This is possible because guidelines are not binding, and actual regulations or policies coming from the Ministry of Health do not require residential care facilities to acknowledge, support, or work with independent Family Councils.

Recommendations

We request that the Ministry of Health develop and adopt regulations and policies that entrench opportunities for Family Councils in all residential care facilities within British Columbia, and require all public and private facilities to cooperate with and assist Family Councils.

Regulations and policies should achieve the following:

- I. Family Councils be defined in regulations as independent, self-determining, democratic groups of family members, or representatives, or persons of importance to individual residents, who advocate for residents in care and work to advance the quality of their lives.

- II. Family Councils have the ability to:
 - i. provide assistance, education, information to residents and their families, representatives, and/or persons of importance to residents;
 - ii. inform residents, their families, representatives and/or persons of importance to residents about their rights and entitlements under The Seniors Bill of Rights, Residential Care Regulations, the Hospital Act, and the Home and Community Care Policy Manual;
 - iii. inform the facility of any concerns or recommendations that the Family Council might have, and request the facility to respond to those concerns or recommendations within a reasonable time frame; and
 - iv. obtain detailed information about “allowable fees” being charged within a residential care facility.

- III. residential care facilities be required to:
 - i. provide a mutually agreed upon staff liaison who will attend Family Council meetings when requested;
 - ii. provide a meeting space for the Family Council if requested;
 - iii. permit and support the operation of the Family Council;
 - iv. inform every new resident and their family member, representative, or person of importance to the resident, of Residential Care Regulations or the Hospital Act, and the Home and Community Policy Manual;
 - v. establish an on-site process for responding to complaints;
 - vi. provide every new family member, representative and/or person of importance to the resident with contact and operational information about the Family

Council, and also to seek to share (with permission) their contact information with the Family Council;

- vii. inform resident's family, representative and/or person of importance to the resident of the importance of the establishment of the Family Council; and
- viii. appoint a facilitator to help start and operate a Family Council if family members, representatives or persons of importance to residents are experiencing difficulty in the process. The facilitator must have the intention of stepping out of the leadership role as soon as leadership can be found within the Family Council membership. While the facilitator is acting in a leadership role, family members must be granted the opportunity in every meeting to discuss issues without the attendance of the facilitator.

IV. Ministry of Health be required to:

- i. provide assistance for the establishment of Regional Associations of Family Councils in every Health Authority, including arms-length funding for such things as websites and annual general meetings of Regional Associations;
- ii. ensure consistency in any/all publications from the Ministry of Health, other related Ministries, and Health Authorities with regard to rights, expectations, guidelines and operating procedures as they relate to Family Councils.



Addendum 1

What is a Family Council?

A Family Council is a self-determining, democratic body composed of friends, family members, or other persons of importance to residents in residential care.

A successful Family Council will:

- Provide a way for all its members to share ideas and experiences with each other...
- Provide its members with educational experiences...
- Establish effective lines of communication between all stake-holders...
- Have regular meetings that can provide a forum for safe, productive discussion, and help participants to identify strengths that they want to protect in a facility, as well as issues that are a concern to many family members...
- Offer suggestions to management on matters related to delivery of quality care for seniors...
- Provide input to processes such as accreditation...
- Work on projects that will benefit seniors...
- Link with Family Councils in other facilities to identify and address concerns that are systemic between facilities, communities, or Health Authorities.

(excerpt from VIAFC website)

