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## **New Alzheimer's program changing lives at St. Leonard's**

Dr. Govind Bharwani, Director of Nursing Ergonomics at Nursing Institute of West Central Ohio and Co-Director of Ergonomics at BIE department, College of Engineering, Wright State University, along with Meena Bharwani, a local independent consultant and a graduate of MIT and Cornell, have now developed a program for St. Leonard Franciscan Living Community that is catching the eye of leaders in the industry.

For years, Alzheimer's and dementia have taken a toll on both the patients suffering from the disease and those caring for them. The disease's unpredictable patterns can often cause patients to be easily agitated and leave caregivers mentally and physically exhausted. In most cases, continuing care retirement communities have had no customized person-centered care programs to address the issues facing their patients and workers.

That is, until now. Recently, St. Leonard launched a revolutionary program in its Alzheimer and dementia unit that has drastically changed the way its caregivers are able to care and engage its residents. The program works by preventing the two main causes of behavior problems in Alzheimer and dementia patients: boredom and disengagement.

Dr. Bharwani and Meena have created a Behavior-Based Ergonomics (BBE) program to reduce cognitive (mental) stress on Alzheimer/Dementia residents by using customized comforting and stimulating interventions. They visited various Alzheimer care units across the state and found one common thread: caregivers lacked the right resources needed to calm and soothe residents according to their specific needs. Most centers only knew how to engage residents in group settings, which often met the need of some residents, but not all.

With funding from the St. Leonard Foundation, the duo created a resource center for the caregivers that provides them the tools required to meet the needs of each resident according to his/her individual learning style, personality and behavior profile, as well as cognitive skill level. The specialized center is a place where caregivers can go, and within two to three minutes, select the intervention item to help engage a resident or keep them from becoming agitated during peak times of the day.

The resource center contains portable CD and DVD players, individual headphones, and four types of libraries including resident memory prop boxes, DVD library, Music library and Cognitive Stimulating library of games and puzzles

tailored to Alzheimer residents. Each library item is carefully coded and a BBE action plan is created for each resident by listing the appropriate codes.

A resident memory prop box contains items from a resident's past that is furnished by family members. Items include family photo albums, comforting items, and hobby magazines that mean something special to that individual. The DVD library contains documentaries, sports, and hobbies that fit the individual resident's personality profiles. CD library is intended to do the same through music intervention. Various cognitive stimulating items are cataloged for interventions, individually or with their family members.

Music and movies may have always been a tool that caregivers have tried in Alzheimer and dementia units, but what makes the Bharwanis' method so unique is the way in which it is organized. In a matter of a couple of minutes, caregivers can identify a resident need, walk into the resource center, read their BBE action codes, and select the appropriate intervention for that resident at that particular time. This program complements the group activities program coordinated by Debra Stewart and Beth Wint for the Alzheimer residents.

"One of the goals we have here is to give the most one-on-one time with our residents and to use the least amount of behavioral medicine we can," said Terri Walker, manager over the Alzheimer and dementia unit. "This program has really helped because they are able to enjoy what they know and love from their past. Caregivers are now able to prevent the agitated behaviors in the residents by going to the resource center and finding items with which to engage the resident."

Laura Spain, who has been a nursing assistant on the unit for 10 years, says "I have a resident who goes down for a nap in the afternoon and used to just stare at the ceiling, now I can put headphones on her (with music she likes) and she's asleep in 10 minutes."

Marsha Eustache, who is an Alzheimer unit nurse, said, "The staff now has the ability to offer relaxation and comfort to residents using items that are individually selected for them. The residents react to their environment in a more positive way."

The residents' family members have also reacted very positively to the BBE program. "These tools are simple and yet effective way to break communication barriers when you don't know what to say," said Jacob Mygatt, grandson of a resident. "This program should increase the cognitive ability of the residents. I am very enthusiastic about it," Keith Richey, son of a resident.

Dr. Bharwani recently presented the results of the program at an industry conference in Indiana and was asked to share his research and methods at a national conference in May.

"We are setting the stage for how Alzheimer care and therapy will be done throughout the nation," he said. "St. Leonard is the birthplace for this unique approach. This is truly a coordinated effort between St. Leonard, Wright State University, Alzheimer Association, and Nursing Institute of West Central Ohio."

"I am excited that St. Leonard is a pioneer in this personalized approach for Alzheimer/dementia care, which also aligns very well with our commitment to person-centered care. Dr. Bharwani and Meena worked very hard and interacted very well with all my staff to implement this program in our Alzheimer unit. We plan to expand this program to Assisted Care, Adult Day Care, and the upcoming Memory Support Center project. I cannot thank enough the committed members of our task force as well as the Advisory Board for taking the extra time to making the dementia care experience better for our residents, staff and family members," said Tim Dressman, Executive Director of St. Leonard.

"This is a cutting edge program for Alzheimer care," said Troy Hutchinson, Administrator at St. Leonard.

The program was launched at St. Leonard at just the right time. The community will break ground on a new multi-million-dollar facility dedicated to Alzheimer and dementia care. The memory care facility will have 30 skilled memory beds and 30 assisted care memory beds.