



HMB440H Dementia Community Engaged Learning

HMB440H Dementia is senior level University of Toronto course for Life Science students. Many of our students go on to careers in healthcare and research. We explore multi-disciplinary aspects of aging and dementia (clinical, genetic, pathological, caregiving and social) with a focus on the most common cause of dementia, Alzheimer's disease. As the population ages, a larger proportion of people will experience deteriorating intellectual, social and occupational functioning due to aging related cognitive decline related to dementia. Course materials come alive as students are also provided a placement opportunity to visit a resident of a local long-term care facility, or a senior living at home in community, some with dementia. The goal is simply to make a friend – to provide companionship and socialization to reduce the isolation which is so prevalent in this population. Students gain a further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility.

Part 1 of Placement – Friendly Visiting (NOTE: for Jan. 2021 the opportunity is exclusively virtual using Companion Calls – no in person visits due to pandemic)

Students will become regular volunteers at partner facilities and become a friendly visitor for 1 on 1 visits (**call, facetime etc.**) with a resident. The simple goal is to make a friend; to provide an enjoyable weekly hour of socialization. Expectations are for the students to visit (**call/facetime**) once or twice a week, for a minimum of 8-10 visits during the term. Students follow regular intake/training procedures for volunteers. Course instruction will support learning to become a great friendly visitor. It's simple really - you are just meeting a new friend. Of course, aging and dementia make everything challenging, including socializing and communicating. Research shows that caregiving is far more successful and rewarding if "personhood" is recognized in the elderly. Students will learn how to discover and respect that personhood.

Part 2 of Placement – Life History Project

For the elderly person, maintaining personhood is paramount to retaining dignity, a sense of control, and some independence – all factors known to improve quality of life. Memory loss associated with aging and dementia often leads to anxiety and depression as the feelings of identity and control slip away. During visits with their new friend, students will engage in discussions to reminisce about life events. This can be a challenge considering that memory is often seriously compromised with aging and dementia. However, many studies have indicated that long-term or remote memories remain largely intact. Reminiscing activities can be extremely beneficial because they focus on this strength and remaining capacity of an individual. Recalling memories and recapturing the emotions that go with them can bring a sense of comfort and accomplishment to a person with dementia who otherwise may feel lost and depressed. The "magical moments" generated by such activities are known to accrue lasting emotional and cognitive benefits. The goal of the project is to learn enough about the



new friend to create something that represents their “Life History”. The activity in essence, strengthening personhood. The project will be presented back to the resident and the family at the end of the course and often become cherished mementos.

Example Projects that have been created in the past...

- a traditional biography - more suitable for a resident without memory problems who may be very capable of sharing extensive life histories
- a collage/diorama/scrapbook/photo album – capturing one or many life events
- artwork with narratives – which can be co-created with the resident
- a diary – or creative diary-like narratives

References

Narrative Therapy and Elders with Memory Loss. Elizabeth Young. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 2008.

Valuing the person’s story: Use of life story books in a continuing care setting. Teresa Wills and Mary Rose Day. *Clinical Interventions in Aging*, 2008.

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2682386/>

Expectations from Community Partners

1. Willing to pilot 1-2 spots for Companion Calls for students starting in January 2021.
2. Process students through regular volunteer intake protocols to adhere to all safety, risk, privacy etc. policies.
3. Choose and recruit a resident to participate in companion calls (in pilot stage, a more capable resident who may independently be able to phone/facetime is preferred) – obtain permission by resident/family as necessary.
4. Facilitate Companion Calls (phone calls/facetime/skype) communications between a student and a resident generally once per week for ~30 minutes (the student arranges with the home a regular day/time for the call, the home facilitates the beginning of the call with the resident)
5. Total commitment from home may be 5 minutes per student once per week to facilitate the beginning of the call.

See next page for information we need from community partners to proceed with this opportunity.



(Example information needed by the course to offer spots to students)

1. A short description of the facility, and the number of confirmed spots (S)

Sample

The Reikai Centres <http://www.rekaicentre.com/> (2 students)

The Reikai Centres are Long Term Care Homes in downtown Toronto. The Reikai Centres strive to enrich the lives of their residents by transforming its long-term care model, ensuring that they remain part of their downtown community. The Reikai Centre at Sherbourne Place exudes warmth within the walls of this intimate 126 bed long term care home located directly across the road from Allen's Garden. Wellesley Central Place. Situated on the site of the former Wellesley Hospital, the Reikai Centre at Wellesley Central Place opened its doors in 2005 and is home to 150 residents.

2. Important Information and requests by the community partner

Sample

- We have some residents who speak only Cantonese or Portuguese – fluency in those languages is necessary
- Students must be sensitivity to mental health or cognitive impairment – though we will train you to interact appropriately

3. A clear process for students to follow once they have chosen this opportunity

Sample

- Send an email to mentioning you are a student of this course (volunteer coordinator? Staff representative? Or even course Professor who will facilitate the startup) once you have chosen this placement
- You will receive an application form – complete and return to
- Attend a volunteer orientation/training session on
- Obtain a Criminal Record check with vulnerable sector search
- *This placement requires a negative TB test, a flu vaccination, and a Covid19 vaccination

Thank you!

If you have any questions or would like to discuss placements, please contact me!

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