

Media Release

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In light of the death of a resident of a long-term care home in Scarborough last week, the Gerontological Nursing Association Ontario (GNAO) is highlighting the need for expert staff, in the right numbers, in long-term care homes. "All health care providers including nurses who care for persons with dementia must have the right mix of knowledge and skills to prevent catastrophic events like this from occurring," says GNAO President, Lori Schindel Martin, also a researcher and professor at the Daphne Cockwell School of Nursing at Ryerson University. She adds, "This terrible loss has shown us how complex the care being delivered in long-term care has become. Not only do many long-term care homes need more people employed on the night shift but must have every care giver on every shift skilled and confident in their abilities to assess sudden changes in a resident's behavioural profile and physical condition, know how to take appropriate action, and have rapid access to mental health resources."

GNAO recognizes the tremendous skill sets currently held by staff working in long-term care homes in the province. However, system pressures across health care sectors have created unreasonable demands on long-term care homes to accept adults of all ages with diverse care needs, including individuals with significant mental health concerns who require intense monitoring and frequent adjustments to treatment protocols. This type of resident has very different care and assessment needs than the older adult resident who is recovering from a stroke or living with Alzheimer disease in a long-term care home.

Older adults living in Ontario long-term care homes deserve access to the best possible care. Dr. Sinha, the provincial lead for the Ontario Seniors Strategy, recommended this in his report to the Minister of Health and Minister Responsible for Seniors, noting that enhancing Ontario's long-term care homes is critical to improving the health of older adults. One of Dr. Sinha's recommendations supports Schindel Martin's assertion regarding knowledge and skills in order to "enable long-term care homes to provide higher levels of care to individuals with complex care needs." GNAO members are eagerly awaiting the provincial government's commitment to act on Dr. Sinha's recommendations by further intensifying the resources provided to long-term care homes in order to ensure what was a preventable tragedy in Scarborough from ever happening again.

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