

Eat, Drink and Be Merry: Enhancing Meals & Snacks Course

Dear Administrator or Director of Nursing:

Unintentional weight loss, undernutrition and dehydration are common problems among nursing home residents that can lead to a host of other problems, including delayed wound healing, immune dysfunction, and increases in the rates of hospitalizations and death. Among the many causes of nutritional problems among nursing home residents, recent evidence suggests that the amount and quality of mealtime assistance they receive is possibly the most powerful determinant of their daily food and fluid intake. Recent research has shown that 90% of nutritionally at-risk residents significantly improved their food and fluid intake in response to a mealtime assistance intervention offered during and between meals. We at the Scripps Gerontology Center at Miami University are asking you to participate in an applied research study designed to help nursing homes implement this intervention.

The purpose of the study is to improve feeding assistance for nursing home residents at risk for unintentional weight loss by administering a distance learning course that guides nurse supervisors through the implementation of an enhanced feeding assistance program in their facilities. The study will also evaluate the feasibility of using distance learning methods to educate and train nurse supervisors.

You are being asked to participate because you are an administrator or Director of Nurses and have been deemed capable of overseeing the implementation of a feeding assistance program for at-risk residents.

If you agree to participate, you and other staff members from nursing homes across the country will meet with this project's staff via monthly teleconferences to learn about and discuss procedures for improving feeding assistance during meals and snack times, with the intent that you will begin to implement and monitor an enhanced feeding assistance program in your facility. Unlimited staff members from your facility may participate in these teleconferences if a speaker phone is used. We strongly encourage you to invite other staff members to attend as their participation is likely to facilitate the implementation of improved feeding assistance. Nurse educators from across the country have also been invited to audit the courses.

We will meet six times, starting in February, 2010, and each teleconference will last about 40 minutes. The teleconferences will be held once every month through May, starting at 2 p.m. (Eastern time). A follow-up teleconference will be held in July. Field assignments are expected to take 1-1/2 hours per month. Assignments include, for example, reading (the course curriculum is available online at http://www.cas.muohio.edu/bridgeproject/meals_schedule.htm), attempting a trial run of prompted feeding assistance with two or three residents at a time, maintaining the service for responsive residents, and sharing program results with nurse aides. Through these assignments, you (or staff you designate) will begin to implement improved feeding assistance step by step with residents at risk for unintentional weight loss.

We will audio-record the teleconference lectures and post them to the project website so that you and other participants can use the recordings for intra-facility training purposes. The project director will mute all phones prior to the start of each lecture, so comments from participants will not be inadvertently recorded. No part of any post-lecture discussion will be recorded.

In order to evaluate the training you receive, we will ask you to take a pre-/post-training quiz and complete an administrator's report as well as course evaluation at the end of the project. We encourage you to negotiate with your supervisor for time during your workday to complete these assignments. If you complete the training, the field assignments, and submit your quizzes and evaluation reports, then you will receive 12.33 contact hours of continuing education from the Ohio Nurses Association (OBN-001-91), an accredited approver of continuing nursing education by the American Nurses Credentialing Center's Commission on Accreditation. Please

note that these activities are a requirement for earning CEs. However, you may elect to withhold any data you submit from research purposes; doing so will not disqualify you from earning CEs.

As noted earlier, we expect that you will attempt to implement the feeding assistance program in your facility during the course of this project. Whether and how you implement the program will be left to your discretion; however, we will offer training, recommendations, and sample forms to help guide implementation of the program. In addition, Principal Investigator Anna Rahman or the project coordinator will follow-up with you by phone between teleconferences to offer assistance and answer any questions you might have. We also will create a members-only Yahoo! discussion group so that course participants can share experiences and offer each other assistance. Only project staff and enrolled nursing home staff and educators will be members of this online group. You can un-subscribe from the group at any time by following directions on the Yahoo! group's web page.

To evaluate your feeding assistance program, we will ask you to report each month the total number of residents assessed for the program, the number of who are responsive to improved feeding assistance, and the number who continue to receive the service. Please note that we will offer instruction on how to collect this data. No resident names or identifiers will be reported to us; we are asking you to report anonymous data only.

In order to participate in this project, you must have access during your work day to an Internet-connected computer and an email account. Individuals age 18 or younger are ineligible to participate.

We hope that you will join us in this applied research project. The only foreseeable risk is that other participating nurse home providers may learn of feeding assistance problems within your facility. Advantages to participation include the opportunity to learn about recommended procedures for improving feeding assistance, the opportunity to receive assistance with implementing improved feeding assistance in your facility, and the opportunity to earn contact hours at no charge.

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you are free to stop participation in this project at any time; you need only contact your administrator or, alternatively, this project's principal investigator, Dr. Robert Applebaum, at (513) 529-2914 or applebra@muohio.edu. As noted earlier, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of CEUs to which you are otherwise entitled.

As noted earlier, it is possible that other participating nursing home staff or nursing home educators will learn your name and the name of your facility during teleconferences or online discussions. All other data collected in the course of this project, including course evaluations and quiz scores, will be kept strictly confidential. No identifying information will be included in project reports. All project records will be stored in a locked file cabinet in Dr. Applebaum's office at the Scripps Gerontology Center.

If you are willing to participate, please sign the consent form below and send or fax it to Anna Rahman at Miami University, Scripps Gerontology Center, Upham Hall, Room 396, Oxford, OH 45056-1879; fax: (513) 561-0919 or (615) 322-1754. If you have questions about the study, please call me at the Scripps Gerontology Center at (513) 529-2914. If you have about your rights as a research subject, please contact the Office for the Advancement of Research and Scholarship at (513) 529-3600.

Sincerely,

Robert Applebaum, Ph.D., Professor
Scripps Gerontology Center
Miami University
Upham Hall, Room 396
Oxford, OH 45056-1879

