

CCRT (Continuing Care Resource Team): a Multi-disciplinary Partnership Supporting LTC Homes in Outbreak Management.

Kevin Duran, RN, MD, CIC; Jinil John, BSc.N, RN

Saskatchewan Health Authority — Saskatoon, SK, Canada

Abstract

The Continuing Care Resource Team (CCRT) is a multi-disciplinary team formed as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. CCRT supports Long-Term Care (LTC) homes located in the former Saskatoon Health Region. Multiple projects were developed by CCRT, including but not limited to: COVID-19 outbreak simulations, Safety Walk, Point-of-Care Test (POCT) strategy, updating the N95 registry, and, the CCRT e-mail. Communication lines were improved between LTC homes and Public Health, Continuing Care, OHS, and, IPAC departments. Simulations and Safety Walks improved the homes' preparedness for the pandemic. CCRT has become an integral resource in improving LTC homes' capacity in dealing with outbreaks by ensuring that homes have the multi-disciplinary support they need during an outbreak.

Introduction

The Continuing Care Resource Team was created in May 2020 in response to the impact of SARS-CoV-2 on LTC homes located in the former Saskatoon Health Region. Due to initial concerns about LTC homes' readiness when dealing with a COVID-19 outbreak, the Continuing Care Executive Director tasked the department to create a team that will go into LTC homes and run through different scenarios related to COVID-19. The team consisted of health-care professionals from different departments: Continuing Care, OHS, IPAC, Public Health, and, Patient and Family Centred Care. CCRT was originally tasked to create COVID-19 simulations for LTC homes. The simulations included different scenarios ranging from what homes would do if they have a single COVID-19 positive resident, to scenarios that included transferring a COVID-19 positive resident to acute care. From creating and running COVID-19 scenarios, the team's work evolved on to other projects including but not limited to: Safety Walks, a Deficiency Tracker, POCT strategy, updating the N95 registry, and, the CCRT e-mail to name a few.

Projects

Simulations

The purpose of the simulations was to assess a LTC home's preparedness and response to a COVID-19 outbreak. These were used early on in the pandemic to evaluate a home's pandemic preparedness plan. Four working groups were formed to create simulations focusing on different processes in LTC:

LTC Move-in from Community Simulation

This simulation focused on LTC move-ins from community starting from the moment a resident accepts a room to the move in process itself until their first two weeks in the home.

LTC COVID-19 Watch* Simulation

The focus of this simulation was to assess a LTC home's response when a resident or staff has signs and symptoms compatible with COVID-19.

LTC COVID-19 Outbreak* Simulation

The focus of this simulation was to determine a LTC home's readiness for a confirmed COVID-19 outbreak. This simulation also tested their pandemic plan and allowed for the home to make changes if necessary.

LTC to LTC Home Transfer Simulation

The focus of this simulation was to assess measures a LTC home has put in place to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 during a resident transfer between two homes.

*Outbreak definitions used for the simulations:

COVID-19 Watch = 1 ill Staff or Resident pending specimen results

Suspect COVID-19 Outbreak = 1 COVID-19 Positive Staff or Resident

© Confirmed COVID-19 Outbreak = 2 COVID-19 Positive Staff or Residents

Safety Walk and Deficiency Tracker

A triad of members from Continuing Care, OHS, and, IPAC met with a LTC home's leadership team to perform a Safety Walk. During these sessions, the CCRT assessed what a LTC home is doing well, what a home can improve on, and what dates the recommended changes needed to be completed by.

From 2020 to mid-2022, Safety Walks occurred every 6-8 weeks. From mid-2022 onwards, Safety Walks were planned to occur once every quarter. When a LTC home goes into a declared outbreak, the CCRT attempts to do an outbreak-focused Safety Walk within 48 hours of outbreak declaration. As homes become proficient with outbreak management, the timeline to be in a home after outbreak declaration changed from 48 to 72 hours. As the pandemic progressed and outbreak measured eased, CCRT now performs two types of Safety Walks:

1) Routine Safety Walk: occurs once a year.

2) Outbreak-focused Safety Walk: occurs within 72 hours after an outbreak is declared by public health.

home after the Safety Walks are flagged to ensure proper follow-up. Items were categorized into:

A provincial deficiency tracker was developed by the Saskatchewan Health Authority as a database to keep track of assessments made by the CCRT. Recommendations provided to the

Red - immediate attention

Yellow - corrective action recommended within 1-3 months

Green - no attention needed/action taken

POCT strateg

A testing strategy using a rapid antigen test was implemented for early detection of asymptomatic COVID-19 positive cases. LTC residents were tested weekly.

N95 registry

In Saskatchewan, a Fit Testing Registry exists that lists the respiratory protection status of Healthcare workers. CCRT worked with homes to schedule fit-testing for their staff at a centralized location. CCRT also increased the home's capacity to do their own fit-testing by sending staff to fit-tester training.

CCRT E-mail

Multiple pandemic guidelines and policy changes were developed by the province. To keep homes updated, a weekly email that summarized key updates, new processes and changes to provincial guidelines, is sent by CCRT to all LTC homes.

Pandemic Readiness Plans (PRP)

During the start of the pandemic, the Continuing Care department tasked the leadership team of all LTC homes to develop their PRP. The plan included components such as: infection control plan, staff cohorting plan, PPE supply levels, outbreak reporting, etc. CCRT reviewed PRPs weekly to identify which areas the home needed help with. CCRT then provided support to initiate improvements.

Nebulizers to Metred-Dose Inhalers (MDI)

To reduce the amount of AGMPs (Aerosol Generating Medical Procedures) used in LTC homes, guidelines were sent to the homes to consult with their physicians and pharmacists to consider switching all nebulizer medications to MDIs.

Challenges

Cohorting of staff

One of the challenges faced during the start of CCRT was the cohorting rules set forth by the province of Saskatchewan. Healthcare workers were only allowed to work in one site. There are 30 LTC homes within the former Saskatoon Health Region. During the 4th quarter of 2020, an outbreak preparedness checklist was created by SHA for all homes to assess their level of readiness for the pandemic. A deadline was imposed on homes to have the checklist done before the end of 2020. In order to efficiently assess all homes, cohorting exemptions were requested and later approved by the Saskatoon-area Medical Health Officer allowing CCRT members to go into more than one LTC home during a 24 hour period.

Results and Discussion

CCRT has become a turnkey operation for LTC homes to ask questions and has become a way for homes to elevate concerns to the regional leadership level. There has been positive feedback from homes about the work of the CCRT. The simulations helped homes identify gaps in their pandemic plans. Findings from a Safety Walk enabled homes to redistribute resources to ensure they are up-to-date with CCRT recommendations. The POCT strategy allowed for early detection of asymptomatic cases ensuring a prompt start of outbreak protocols. Percentage of staff fit-tested to an N95 increased from <60% prior to the pandemic to 85%. There has been positive feedback from the leadership of homes. Maria Villarosa, former Director of Care, Sunnyside Adventist Care Centre stated: "The CCRT email has provided consistent, up to date & pertinent information and guidelines. The Safety Walks is an opportunity for "fresh eyes" to see what's working well & at the same time, fill the gaps in our practices. The report from the Safety Walk enables us to review our processes and continue to work on improvements." While Laurie Marple, Vice President Quality Care and Safety, Jubilee Residences stated: "The CCRT was vital in our preparedness and risk reduction throughout the pandemic as an organization. Their proactive approach to safety, Infection Control and education created an environment of collaboration, trust and empowerment for our interdisciplinary teams. The resources and guidance through safety walks, outbreak simulations and weekly updates assisted us to reduce impact and spread of COVID19 in our homes while providing us knowledge and information to share with our elders, their families and our staff." The work of CCRT continues beyond the pandemic and can be a model for other jurisdictions to support LTC homes in a multi-disciplinary approach.

CCRT Timeline

Dates	Milestone	Description
March 2020	Pandemic declared in Canada.	
April 2020	Pandemic Readiness Plan (PRP) started.	As required by the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA), LTC homes' leadership teams developed their PRP to prepare their homes for the pandemic.
May 2020	Continuing Care Resource Team formed.	First official meeting was on May 13, 2020. Work was prioritized to help LTC homes have all measures in place to prevent and manage COVID-19 outbreaks.
May 2020	SHA's COVID-19 Response Guidance for Long Term Care Facilities published.	Guidance document was created by SHA for LTC homes to follow during a COVID-19 outbreak.
June 2020	Working groups created to develop simulations.	Developed 4 different types of simulations with various possible scenarios in a LTC home.
	First CCRT e-mail went out June 9, 2020.	All COVID-19 resources rolled out by SHA within a time period were gathered into one email then sent to all LTC homes.
	AGMP data collection.	Identified which homes regularly performed AGMPs. This enabled prioritization of N95 fit-testing schedules.
	Move-in testing strategy developed.	Work Standards created for COVID-19 testing requirements for residents before moving in to a LTC home.
July 2020	Process at a Glance (PAAG) for simulations developed.	PAAG was created to guide homes through the simulation process.
	Pilot of simulations started at select LTC homes.	Simulations were refined after the pilot.
August 2020	Exemption status granted to CCRT members.	Allowed CCRT members to go into more than one LTC home within a 24-hour period.
October 2020	Combined multiple stimulations into one.	Allowed CCRT to conduct more than one simulation during a visit.
November 2020	Transport of Outbreak Specimens Work Standard developed.	Created to facilitate testing of specimens and to acquire test results timely.
December 2020	Point of Care testing.	Regular testing of residents for early detection and management of COVID-19.
December 2020	Peer to Peer COVID-19 testing.	Allowed staff to perform tests on each other.
January 2021	LTC Home Outbreak and Routine Safety Walks.	Home visits now conducted on a regular basis to assess progress and provide recommendations.
	Rapid Antigen Testing (RAT) kit deployment.	LTC home staff trained to use RAT kits.
March 2021	LTC designated-staff sent to fit-tester training.	Initiated to ensure homes have capacity to conduct their own N95 fit-test.
March 2022	Mitigating spread of COVID-19 in secure dementia care areas.	This work focused on LTC homes with dementia units to manage behaviors to reduce the spread of COVID-19.
October 20, 2022	100th CCRT E-mail sent out to LTC homes.	

Map of the former Saskatoon Health Region



