SASKATCHEWAN ASSOCIATION FOR
SAFE WORKPLACES
IN HEALTH

SPOTLIGHT ON SAFETY — A HEALTHCARE SUCCESS STORY

Birchview Home, Birch Hills, SK

Summary:

- **Communication is front and centre when it comes to safety.**
- **Staff are finding their voice and "Stopping the Line" when faced with unsafe work practices.**
- **A strong SMS takes time, dedication and commitment.**

Birchview Home is a 30-bed special care home in Birch Hills - there are 29 long-term care beds and 1 respite bed with a staff complement of 62. The home offers a range of personal and health services to people who are elderly, disabled or chronically ill and need 24-hour care. The home also provides a number of health care supports like day programs, respite and rehabilitation services to people who still live in their own homes. Care and services are provided based on individual resident needs using an interdisciplinary team approach.

Achieving a Strong Safety Management System

The statement "necessity is the mother of invention" certainly applies to Birchview Home's Safety Management System (SMS) journey. Prior to their SMS audit, they thought they had dotted their "i's" and crossed their "t's" as far as safety was concerned. The specifics of the elements were still a vague notion but "safety" in general came first and they thought they were fairly solid.

Back row (L to R): Charlotte Powalinsky, Birchview Home's Director of Care with staff Lorne Vanderlinde, Ian Carrier, Pam Linfitt; sitting in front: Lynn Hunter

Once notified that an audit was to take place, they developed a plan and moved ahead with gusto and zeal! Staff education about SMS began in earnest. They shone a brighter light on safety through regular communication about the importance of following principles, procedures and practices related to safety - the consequences of failing to do so was also communicated. They reviewed the SMS Elements and created a plan to address what they felt were deficits. Over the next year, they slowly worked at eliminating the deficits.

In the fall of 2018, they realized that safety could not be managed off the side of anyone's desk and they began a deep dive into their SMS. A staff member and management dedicated time to the SMS weekly. This focused approach made a huge, positive impact and while the SMS is a work in progress, their safety culture is stronger than ever!

Advances over the past two years include:

- ⇒ putting safety first at both the 07:00 and 13:30 huddles
- ⇒ including additional safety topics during the annually pre-planned safety talks, as needed
- ⇒ increasing the size of the OH&S bulletin board from 4 feet to 20 feet long
- ⇒ posting relevant educational material alongside the mandatory items on the OH&S bulletin board
- ⇒ posting Job Safety Analysis forms beside the OH&S bulletin board

⇒ printing all safety related topics on yellow paper
⇒ ensuring that each department has a representative on the OHC
⇒ holding a "Safety Education Fair" annually
⇒ holding people accountable for reading/signing safety talks
⇒ matching staff strengths/aptitudes/ interests with safety related areas of responsibilities, e.g., PART/TLR/ WHMIS Trainers, TLR Core Committee, etc.
⇒ dedicating specific months to specific training, e.g., October – PART month
⇒ ensuring that equipment is maintained and checked regularly
⇒ including safety in the employee annual review process

What has mainly changed leading practice and strengthened safety culture at Birchview Home was making safety BIG and BOLD – in addition to the 20-foot long OH&S bulletin board in putting safety front and centre, safety is the first topic at huddles, SMS topics are communicated consistently and subtly (including being discussed during employee annual reviews). The SMS Audit has been instrumental in this second phase of their SMS journey.

Although one safety incentive has not been implemented yet, Birchview Home plans to draw attention to staff who are following proper TLR principles. Recognition will take the form of a certificate acknowledging and highlighting the practice being followed. Currently, there are accolades during the safety portion of huddles highlighting safety and door prizes have been awarded at the annual Safety Education Fairs.

What is required for safer workplaces and safe care? ....

- **Leadership and commitment**
- **Training and education**
- **Accountability to work safe**
- **Equipment to provide safe care**
- **Hazard identification and control**

The Job Safety Analysis forms are beside the OH&S bulletin board

OHC Employee Co-chair

Birchview Home boasts a 20-foot long OH&S bulletin board

Approaches that have impacted staff to "buy in" to safety to date –

- ⇒ linking personal health and well-being at retirement to working safely today
- ⇒ linking family/personal life to safe work practices
- ⇒ communicating potential consequences of not following safety rules
- ⇒ strongly committed on-site trainers
- ⇒ safety signage that is simple and relevant
- ⇒ posting safety training re-evaluation dates on the OH&S bulletin board
- ⇒ closing training sessions with a message from management tying the training to the SMS
- ⇒ putting safety at the beginning of huddles

One of the greatest barriers in terms of implementing safety measures or making change is the fact that continuing care is a 24/7 operation. The dynamics of schedules/scheduling makes it very difficult to reinforce learning. Repetition is vital to cement learning and when someone only works occasionally or is off for six days immediately following training there is no opportunity to practice the newly learned skills or processes. Competing workplace demands make it easy to become distracted.

Although staff members have some confusion about the definition of a SMS, a positive shift in safety culture embracement has been staff members'

"Workplace safety is the processes, practices and procedures that identify, mitigate or remove workplace hazards."

- Charlotte Powalinsky, Director of Care, Birchview Home

Birchview Home's slogan really helps to strengthen their safety culture:

"Your first job is safety!"

commitment to following TLR principles – the improvement has been exponential and they have a better understanding of the impact on their own health and safety. Leadership is expanding – it isn't just the manager communicating safety concerns. The OHC members are finding a voice. Staff are holding each other accountable – they are "Stopping the Line" when faced with unsafe work practices. Staff are reporting "potential and near miss" safety issues more frequently.

The OHC members are committed to a safe workplace. They bring concerns forward and are ready, willing and able to problem solve. All members are strong critical thinkers and their input has been instrumental in maintaining a safe workplace.

A strong SMS doesn't happen when people try to manage it off the corner of their desk. It takes time, dedication and commitment, as well as a proactive approach. A SMS Self-Assessment or audit may seem daunting, but it is well worth the effort; however, it is important to accept that there is no finish line. A SMS is dynamic and fluid. It evolves based on workplace demands, job duties and ever changing staff complements. A strong SMS can only be achieved by taking the time to really know and understand the elements of the SMS as well as the team's strengths and areas for improvement.

DOC Charlotte Powalinsky and OHC Member Lynn Hunter

Birchview Home staff have learned that ongoing education is key to success. All staff need a strong understanding of a SMS before safety and job duties are to become synchronous. Once that happens, everyone wins – staff, residents and family. It's important to understand that initially the time commitment is almost overwhelming; however, it does get easier. It is also important to utilize all available resources - the SMS self-assessment and safety consultants. Both are invaluable in the journey to a strong SMS.

Resident Charles (Mac) Galloway and Lynn Hunter

Workplace safety is the processes, practices and procedures that identify, mitigate or remove workplace hazards. It includes the training, participation and commitment of all employees in safety related matters. Workplace safety means that at the end of a shift or career, employees are injury free and able to participate fully in their personal lives.

For more information, you can contact Charlotte Powalinsky via email at: charlotte.powalinsky@saskhealthauthority.ca