



Julie (Nurse Practitioner) visits with Caressant Care Resident, Audrey in the home's library

Meet Julie, a Nurse Practitioner Who is Improving Access to Primary Care for Long-term Care Residents

Julie Murtha has worked with a lot of different people on her path to becoming a nurse practitioner. Always one to celebrate the unique nuances of different cultures and how they influence health care needs, she is proud that her rural experience has afforded her many opportunities to shape a rewarding career serving her community .

"I was raised on a pig farm between Listowel and Milverton. I've always had a passion for our rural residents and their strength and resilience. I'm fortunate to be able to work with people who have such vastly different backgrounds, including those from our Mennonite and Amish communities."

During high school and throughout her university undergrad Julie worked as a personal support worker in long-term care homes to save money for teacher's college, an experience that led her to change her career path to health care. She went into nursing instead.

Her first nursing position was as a rapid response nurse for the Waterloo Wellington Community Care Access Centre where she learned a lot about managing complex health issues, mainly with seniors.

After going back to school to obtain her nursing practitioner designation, Julie accepted a role in June to provide primary care to residents as part of a new, innovative partnership between two long-term care homes. Julie provides this specialized care at Caressant Care in Harriston in the mornings and at Saugeen Valley in Mount Forest in the afternoons.

"Long-term care is a great environment in which to learn. Primary care physicians often don't have a lot of time to come to the homes to focus on the day-to-day needs of long-term care residents so there is a lot of opportunity to provide that one-on-one primary care. It's also a stable environment where residents are supported by a great team. The staff are wonderful."

Julie's role includes helping to share and improve best practices at both homes, providing staff training and teaching and ensuring that care and tests that can be provided at the homes, are.

"We're providing more care interventions which is ensuring that our residents get the care they need quickly, avoiding unnecessary trips to emergency departments. We're also able to support more in-depth conversations and planning around end-of-life care and this provides relief for both residents and their family members."

Resident Audrey is quick to share her thoughts on how care has changed since Julie started working at the homes; "Someone is hearing what I want. She takes the time to listen and we get care and referrals faster."

Julie's role is funded by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care as part of an initiative that will see 75 nurse practitioner positions added to Ontario long-term care homes over three years.