

ONE COUPLE'S DREAM for a more dignified life for people with Alzheimer's disease has, 15 years later, established Edmonton, the University of Alberta and CapitalCare as leaders in research to improve long-term care.



## 15 Years of Research for Care

In 1996, Edmonton homebuilder Ches McConnell and his wife Alma donated \$1.5 million to the University of Alberta and CapitalCare to help build two Alzheimer care centres - McConnell Place North and West - as well as establish a grant to enable research into ways to improve care for those living in residential settings. Ches had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's nearly a decade earlier.

"I had always felt (Alzheimer's) had never got its just due," Alma McConnell said at the time. "Someone you know or someone you are close to will be touched by this disease. And it just seemed to me if Edmonton could sort of specialize, do one thing and do it well, that would be wonderful."

By 2005, two-thirds of the 55 geriatric research projects linked to Edmonton took place in long term care centres - and CapitalCare research grants had funded 17 of them, according to a report by the Institute for Continuing Care Education and Research (IC CER) in Edmonton. Between 2006 and 2009, CapitalCare funded five more grants.

The report also showed that while

most projects were from the University of Alberta, CapitalCare employees produced three times more research than any other healthcare or long term care provider in the city and 15 times more than most providers.

The IC CER report said, "The emphasis on long-term care reflects, in part, the availability of research grants through CapitalCare, including the CapitalCare Foundation Grants and the CapitalCare Alzheimer Research Grants."

The CapitalCare Foundation awarded its first Alzheimer Research Grant in 1996 for just \$10,000. With

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more donations to the CapitalCare Foundation, the Alzheimer Research Grant grew to \$20,000, and a second grant of \$20,000 was established.

That same year, CapitalCare hired Dr. Doris Milke to lead a research unit based out of the Alzheimer care centres. Dr. Milke, a leading environmental gerontologist, had a role in the planning of McConnell Place North. She modeled the research unit after one she had heard about in the US, with a full-time researcher embedded in a long term care organization.

"I had hoped to do research full time," says Milke. "I had worked with CapitalCare administrators and managers as a government employee and I was very impressed by their goals and their efforts to adopt the very best practices known in the long-term care field."

The newly-established Research Unit jumped into key projects like the evaluations of McConnell Place North (opened in 1995), the Mental Health Unit (opened in 1996) at CapitalCare Lynnwood - the first care centre to admit geriatric patients from Alberta Hospital

Edmonton, and Laurier House Lynwood (1997). Over the next decade, CapitalCare would use this research to plan and build its newest centre, the Dianne and Irving Kipnes Centre for Veterans, which opened in 2005.

“The evaluations of our own innovative models of care as well as the growing body of scientific literature on care practices helped to make the relocation of these very important persons a success,” said Milke. “The veterans showed an immediate preference for their new private bedrooms, for example, enhancing them with all manner of comforting features. “

The Research Unit has been a part of explorations into almost every area of care that CapitalCare has dedicated itself to improving. From new types of nurse-call systems, to reducing restraints, personalizing bathing practices, and the components of successful environments in Alzheimer’s care, the Research Unit is on the forefront of CapitalCare’s efforts to make care better.

Recognition of the Research Unit’s activities is growing. In 2009, Milke received the Mary Morrison Davis Award of Excellence from the Alberta Association on Gerontology.

Also in 2009, Milke’s “Five Site” project - a study which looked at the Alzheimer care centres in comparison with similar ones in the US to see how small differences can affect resident and staff behaviours - was published in the Journal of Housing for the Elderly. As a result, Milke was asked to join the journal’s editorial board and the article is used to teach senior architectural students.

In November 2010, a presentation about the mealtime environment at the Kipnes Centre for Veterans with clinical dietician Deanna VanSoest won an award for top poster at the Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital annual research symposium.

Part of the Research Unit’s role is to liaise with other organizations to increase innovation and improve knowledge translation.

In a grant awarded to CapitalCare by Canadian Health Services Research Fund (2004-2007), researchers from across the province worked with decision-makers through innovative partnerships to increase knowledge and practices on the frontlines of care centres across the province. The focus was to make sure that the Minimum Data Set, or Resident Assessment Instrument, being implemented in all LTC centres in Alberta would be used, not only to develop a care plan for individual residents, but also analyzed to improve care across organizations and systems.

Both Alberta Health and Wellness and Edmonton Zone of Alberta Health Services (formerly Capital Health) participated in that research grant. It resulted in several spinoff studies led by nursing researchers at the University of Alberta Faculty of Nursing that still have the same focus.

On April 9, 2011, CapitalCare’s Research Unit marks its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary and its focus is still on care for persons with Alzheimer’s. Over 70% of residents in CapitalCare have some type of dementia and what is learned about Alzheimer’s care is applicable to almost all of those residents.

Please consider a donation to the CapitalCare Foundation’s Research for Care campaign. Your donation, big or small, will go a long way towards improving long term care in the future.

For more information  
[www.capitalcare.net](http://www.capitalcare.net)  
780.448.2413.



Photos above: CapitalCare’s Kipnes Centre for Veterans; Dr. Doris Milke

Photo front: Back yard view of McConnell Place North, Canada’s first residential centre for people with Alzheimer’s