

# A Quality Living Initiative During COVID-19: The Creation of a Palliative Care Unit Garden

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## Abstract

This poster offers an overview of the creation of a palliative care unit (PCU) community garden at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre. This quality initiative was a response to the change in care needs of patients who were suddenly faced with increased isolation at end of life. Through the work of the PCU interprofessional team and the patients themselves, the garden space came to life and programs were adapted to an outdoor environment where opportunities for meaningful engagement and a sense of community could be achieved.



*"With Covid present, human beings need the outdoors. It would have been horrible without this space."* – Family Member

## Quality Living in the Palliative Care Garden

### Engagement

Leisure pursuits facilitated by the Recreation Therapist fostered quality living.

Live music provided by the Music Therapist offered opportunities for relaxation and creative expression.

Opportunities for meaningful conversation were facilitated by the Spiritual Care Practitioner and Social Worker.

### Community

Outdoor space allowed for larger gatherings with physical distancing.

Meaningful activity fostered community building and the formation of friendships between patients.

Patients worked together and shared the results of their harvest.

### Growth

Patients planted and tended to flowers, vegetables and herbs.

Growth and loss were part of the gardening experience and paralleled life within the PCU community.

Opportunities for support and therapeutic intervention with the interprofessional team occurred organically in the garden setting.

### Nature

Patients expressed pleasure in breathing the fresh outdoor air and feeling the sun on their face.

Connections were made to the world outside the hospital doors through the changes in weather and seasons.

Birds and animals that visited the garden added to the feeling of being out in nature.

### Family

Technology enabled the team to support patients in connecting virtually with family members while out in the garden.

As visiting restrictions began to allow for occasional visits from family, the garden offered a comforting space outside the patient room where time could be spent together.

## Outcomes

- Having an outdoor space dedicated to the PCU allowed for programming to meet the needs of PCU patients.
- Many patients eagerly anticipated the opportunity to be outside each day.
- Many members of the interprofessional team assisted in portering patients to and from the garden when they witnessed the benefits of the program.
- Patients were observed developing friendships and experiencing meaningful moments with others.
- Families expressed appreciation that loved ones were enjoying the garden at a time when they could not be together.



*"We go out to the garden every opportunity we have."* – Patient

## Background

- March 2020 and Covid-19 brought a dramatic change to life on the PCU when family visiting schedules were suddenly reduced, often limited to the final week or days of a patient's life.
- Patients felt lonely, isolated and in some cases abandoned.
- New infection prevention guidelines altered the way psychosocial and therapy services could be offered.
- With the aim of continuing to provide quality care, opportunities for quality living and to meet the changing psychosocial needs, the PCU team requested use of a small unused outdoor space.
- Together with patients and in consultation with a Horticultural Therapist, the unused area was transformed into a community garden.
- Revitalization of the space involved finding adequate seating, shade and accessible containers for gardening.
- Programs typically offered on the PCU such as live music, leisure pursuits, virtual visits and individual counselling were adapted to suit an outdoor environment.



*"I watched people talk about the growth of the vegetables and how much they enjoyed being a part of it."* – Patient



## Next Steps

- Initiatives to recreate the successes of the outdoor program in an indoor space will be considered during winter months.
- New ways of approaching the use of outdoor space in years following the pandemic will be considered.



*"I love it here. I am here every day with my Mom. It is so important for the palliative patients to have a garden to enjoy."* – Family Member

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