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Groves Elder Life (GEL) Project - virtual family visits for elderly patients

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Geriatric patients admitted into hospital often have prolonged stays due to medical, surgical and social reasons. In addition, these patients can have elements of dementia, cognitive and mobility issues. They feel isolated and depressed in a different environment away from their loved ones. Although doctors, nurses and other services like physiotherapy provide the best possible care, a family connection is a vital link in the well being of patients. Sometimes it is not possible for family members to visit and it is here that technology can help bridge the gap. We at Groves Memorial Community Hospital in Fergus, Ontario recently launched the Groves Elder Life (GEL) project to virtually put patients in contact with family members. With the use of an iPad, patients' families can schedule calls using applications such as Skype and FaceTime. We started this project with the assistance of Elder Life Specialists from the HELP program and their volunteers at our hospital. We also formulated a privacy policy and ethical guidelines with final approval by the hospital's Medical Advisory Committee. Thus far, the feedback from patients, relatives and hospital staff has been very positive. We believe that such virtual family visits can greatly improve patients' well being and mood, helping decrease elements of depression and expediting recovery. Furthermore, such initiatives can have even greater advantages in larger geriatric wards, nursing and residential homes.

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Homeless older women in Australia: Legal and financial issues underlying a burgeoning problem

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The plight of older homeless women is another troubling by-product of Australia's housing affordability problems coupled with an ageing population. Lifetimes of wage inequality and a continuing lack of housing affordability and availability make it a near-certainty that numbers of homeless older women will increase. As with the general homeless population, homelessness among older women cannot be singularly explained. The group is diverse in age, education, location, cultural background and life circumstances. Homelessness can be triggered by a single, traumatic event or a lifetime of personal disadvantage and misfortune. So, what circumstances can lead to homelessness at an age when most expect "grandmothers" to be ensconced within the family unit? Beyond the pervasive issue of domestic violence, if there is insufficient superannuation, a partner dies, a marriage breaks down later in life or something goes wrong from a health or financial perspective, many older women find themselves in difficult circumstances. This paper considers whether Australian law can play a role in providing a meaningful response to homelessness. Recent efforts at legislating to create entitlements to housing and ensuring accountability are languishing; the paper suggests that such legislation be examined again with a view to embedding entitlements to housing and accountability measures into the law. The paper also examines the financial restraints on homelessness services in Australia. Essential programs for funding of homelessness services and capital works for public housing have been withdrawn or reduced. The paper argues that it is imperative that innovative approaches to housing the homeless are pursued and that more, not less, capital funding is made available. This is especially the case with this "new" group of women who, for the most part do not fit society's image of homelessness. The supply of public housing must be increased with a view to constructing more single accommodation options suitable for older women.

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