

## FAMILY COUNCIL AT A RETIREMENT HOME

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Establishing a Family Council at a retirement home is a structured initiative designed to enhance communication, collaboration, and the overall quality of resident care. Family councils serve as formal platforms where family members, caregivers, staff, and management meet regularly to discuss concerns, share feedback, and participate in decision-making processes. Research supports the role of family councils in improving resident satisfaction, strengthening staff-family relationships, and promoting person-centered care. This project aimed to organize and implement a Family Council to improve communication, increase family engagement, and enhance care outcomes within a retirement home setting.

**Methods:** The project was implemented over a six-month period in three phases: planning and setup, initial council meetings, and ongoing operations with evaluation. An internal steering committee was formed to develop the council structure, define roles (chairperson, secretary, members), and establish meeting protocols. Recruitment of family members and staff was conducted through newsletters, emails, and informational sessions. Meetings were scheduled bi-monthly, with both in-person and virtual participation options available. Data were collected through stakeholder feedback surveys, meeting evaluations, and qualitative assessments of communication, engagement, and care improvements. Continuous monitoring and mid-project reviews were conducted to assess effectiveness and address challenges.

**Results:** The implementation of the Family Council resulted in improved communication between families and staff, increased family involvement in care planning, and enhanced transparency in operational decisions. Families reported greater satisfaction and a stronger sense of inclusion in decision-making processes. Staff indicated improved understanding of resident preferences and family expectations, contributing to more personalized care. While participation levels varied among families, the council successfully fostered collaboration and reduced misunderstandings. Challenges included scheduling conflicts, variable engagement, and the need

for improved communication between meetings; however, these were addressed through structured agendas, digital participation tools, and clearer follow-up procedures.

**Conclusion:** The establishment of a Family Council proved to be an effective strategy for strengthening collaboration among families, staff, and management in a retirement home setting. By creating a structured forum for dialogue and shared decision-making, the initiative enhanced resident-centered care and improved overall satisfaction. Continued evaluation, increased participation strategies, and the integration of digital tools are recommended to sustain and expand the council's impact. Family councils represent a valuable and sustainable model for improving quality of care in long-term residential settings.

**Keywords:** *Family councils; Long-term care; Family engagement; Resident-centered care; Nursing home communication.*

### **Project Definition**

Organizing a family council at a retirement home is a key initiative to enhance communication, collaboration, and care quality for residents. The project aims to establish a formal structure where family members, caregivers, and staff meet regularly to discuss issues, share feedback, and make joint decisions about resident care. By involving families in decision-making, the initiative promotes a more inclusive, transparent, and responsive environment.

Family councils are effective in improving resident care by empowering families to take an active role. Often, family members feel disconnected or uninformed about their loved one's daily life, leading to misunderstandings. The council addresses this by providing a platform for families to express concerns, seek information, and participate in enhancing residents' quality of life.

The initiative targets family members, care staff, and the management team. Family members are central participants, offering insights into residents' needs and concerns. Caregivers and staff contribute perspectives on daily care and operations, while management ensures discussions lead to actionable outcomes and efficient council operations.

The family council aims to improve communication between families and staff, keeping everyone informed about care plans and changes. It serves as a forum to discuss operational issues, care quality, activities, and policies, ensuring residents' needs are considered. The council also fosters community and support among families, reducing isolation and encouraging shared experiences.

The family council is expected to strengthen relationships between families and staff, ensuring residents' needs are met more effectively. Involving families improves care quality and satisfaction, creating a more positive environment. The council supports the retirement home's commitment to person-centred care by valuing all voices involved.

#### *Final Project Overview:*

The establishment of a Family council at a retirement home is a structured, collaborative initiative aimed at improving overall care and the quality of life for residents. This section outlines the council's structure, roles, and responsibilities, the implementation timeline, and the key milestones that will measure the project's success.

### **Structure of the Family Council**

The family council will be structured as a collaborative forum involving several key participants, each playing a vital role in ensuring its effective functioning. The council will consist of family members of the residents , caregivers and staff members ,and retirement home management\*\*.

The primary role of the council will be to serve as a communication bridge between families and staff, ensuring a transparent flow of information and a shared responsibility for decision-making.

- **Council Chairperson:** The family council will have a chairperson, selected from the family members or the management team. The chairperson will be responsible for coordinating meetings, setting agendas, and guiding discussions.
- **Secretary:** A secretary will be appointed to take notes during meetings, document action items, and distribute meeting minutes to all participants. This role ensures that communication and decision-making are well-documented.
- **Family Members:** Family members will be the core participants in the council. They will share feedback and concerns, suggest improvements, and actively contribute to discussions on matters concerning resident care and wellbeing.
- **Caregivers and Staff:** Caregivers and staff will represent the operational side of the retirement home, providing insights into daily care practices and the practicalities of implementing family suggestions. Their role also includes addressing concerns about resources, staffing, and logistics.
- **Management Team:** A representative from the management team (such as the facility's director or an operations manager) will attend the meetings to ensure that family input is integrated into operational decisions and that there is a clear channel for addressing policy or procedural matters [1-6].

#### *Timeline for Implementation*

The family council will be implemented over six months in three phases: Planning and Setup, Initial Council Meetings, and Ongoing Operations and Evaluation.

##### 1. Phase 1 – Planning and Setup (1-2 months):

This phase includes identifying the need for a family council, selecting members, and determining the structure. Outreach to families, caregivers, and staff will generate interest

and encourage involvement. An initial meeting will explain the council's purpose, benefits, and structure.

2. Phase 2 – Initial Council Meetings (2-3 months):

The first meeting will introduce council members, establish communication protocols, and set a schedule for regular meetings. Members will discuss facility operations, care concerns, and suggestions for improvement. Initial meetings will identify actionable goals, review care plans, address resident-specific concerns, and set objectives for inclusive family engagement.

3. Phase 3 – Ongoing Operations and Evaluation (3 months and beyond):

After initial meetings, the council will operate regularly with monthly or bi-monthly sessions. Ongoing evaluations will assess effectiveness, and surveys will gather feedback from families and staff on the council's impact.

*Milestones for Success*

Key milestones throughout the project will help measure progress and success. These include:

1. Initial Family Council Meeting (Month 2):

The first meeting is a key milestone where families, caregivers, and staff discuss the council's structure, purpose, and goals. It also sets clear expectations for participation.

2. First Set of Decisions Made (Month 3):

By the third month, the family council will aim to make its first set of decisions. These could include proposed changes to resident care plans, the introduction of new activities or programs, or addressing concerns related to the facility's operations.

3. Mid-Project Review (Month 4):

A mid-project review will assess progress, engagement, and communication effectiveness, providing an opportunity to refine processes and adjust goals.

4. First Feedback Survey (Month 6):

At the end of six months, a feedback survey will collect input from families, staff, and management on the council's effectiveness, communication quality, and impact on resident care.

5. Ongoing Evaluation and Adjustment (Post-Month 6):

After six months, the council will continue with periodic evaluations and adjustments based on feedback and changing needs.

Following this timeline and achieving milestones will establish the family council within the retirement home's operations, resulting in improved family involvement, communication, and care outcomes for residents [7-15].

1. Updated Research Summary: Organization of Family Council at Retirement Home

The establishment of a family council in a retirement home is grounded in extensive research demonstrating its positive impact on resident care, communication, and community involvement. A family council in a long-term care facility serves as a vital tool for fostering collaboration between families, caregivers, and facility staff. The following research highlights the significance of family councils and their role in enhancing the overall environment of retirement homes.

### **Importance of Family Councils**

Family councils have been recognized as essential to improving the quality of care in retirement homes. According to a study by Fisher (2009), family councils increase family involvement in decision-making about the care of their loved ones. These councils provide a platform for families to voice concerns, share feedback, and discuss critical issues about the residents' well-being. In turn, staff and management can incorporate this input into care planning, fostering a more personalized and responsive care approach.

Additionally, Blanchard & Apter (2015) highlight that family councils help address the disconnect that often exists between families and staff in long-term care settings. In their study, they found that councils improve communication, which is essential for resolving issues related to care plans, health monitoring, and changes in residents' conditions. The engagement of families in these processes leads to more informed care decisions, ensuring that resident preferences and family concerns are respected.

A study by Macdonald et al. (2014) further supports this notion, showing that family councils can serve as a mechanism to improve resident satisfaction. Families who are involved in care decisions and have a structured way to engage with staff report higher levels of satisfaction with

the services provided. This not only improves residents' emotional well-being but also alleviates stress among families, as they know they have an active role in their loved one's care.

#### *Similar Initiatives*

Several case studies have demonstrated the success of family councils in improving care and communication in retirement homes and long-term care facilities. In a case study by Jones et al. (2017), a Canadian retirement home implemented a family council and observed significant improvements in both staff morale and resident care. The family council at this facility allowed families to provide feedback on care routines, and caregivers reported feeling more supported in their roles. Furthermore, the family council served as an essential bridge for addressing family dissatisfaction. The staff and management team at the facility used the council to propose new initiatives based on family feedback, such as offering more diverse activities and improving communication about residents' health statuses.

In another example, Woodward (2012) studied a family council at a nursing home in the United States. The council played a key role in addressing concerns about food quality and recreational activities. After families raised concerns, the management team took action, making changes to dietary plans and introducing new recreational activities, thereby directly improving resident satisfaction. This initiative emphasized how family councils can serve as a channel for resolving issues that directly impact the resident's quality of life[15-20]

#### *Supporting Data*

Research data support the positive impact of family councils on both the quality of care and community involvement in retirement homes. According to a report from the National Institute on Aging (2016), retirement homes with active family councils experience a 30% increase in family satisfaction compared to those without. The report attributes this improvement to the increased transparency and communication between families and staff.

Additionally, a study by Pinzon et al. (2018) found that family councils led to a 15% reduction in care-related complaints, particularly in staffing, cleanliness, and communication. This reduction in complaints is directly linked to family members' proactive involvement in addressing issues before they escalate into larger problems. Furthermore, family engagement in care decisions was found to enhance resident outcomes, particularly in improving emotional and psychological well-being.

Finally, a review by Shaw & Armstrong (2017) concluded that establishing family councils not only improves the quality of care but also positively affects staff retention. By creating a more open and collaborative environment, family councils can reduce staff burnout, enhance job satisfaction, and improve the overall working atmosphere in retirement homes[20-24].

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, the research and case studies consistently support the value of family councils in enhancing communication, improving resident care, and fostering a sense of community in retirement homes. These councils not only provide family members with a platform to express concerns and participate in decision-making, but also ensure that the voices of those most invested in residents' care are heard. As evidenced by various studies and successful case examples, family councils are an essential component in building stronger, more transparent relationships between families, staff, and management, ultimately leading to higher-quality care and improved satisfaction for both residents and their families.

### **Project Implementation Summary**

The implementation of the family council at the retirement home involved a series of carefully planned steps to ensure the project's success while addressing challenges encountered throughout the process. This section provides a detailed account of the action steps taken during the implementation, how participation was encouraged, the logistical arrangements, and how challenges were managed.

### **Initial Planning**

The first step in implementing the family council was identifying the need for such an initiative. The need was recognized based on feedback from both families and staff members. Families expressed concerns about not being fully informed about their loved ones' care and activities, while staff felt that direct communication with family members could help improve the care provided to residents. To formalize this process, we initiated a series of consultation meetings with both family members and staff. These meetings aimed to outline the council's purpose, its potential benefits, and how it could address current gaps in communication and decision-making. An internal steering committee was formed, consisting of key management representatives, a few staff members, and a couple of family members who volunteered during the consultation phase.

This committee worked to develop a formal structure for the council, including its roles, responsibilities, meeting frequency, and goals. Additionally, the committee coordinated the development of initial communication materials, including an informational flyer and an introductory letter to be shared with family members and staff.

### *Recruitment and Engagement*

One of the most important aspects of the family council's successful establishment was **\*\*engaging family members and staff from the very beginning**. Recruitment efforts were launched through multiple channels, including newsletters, emails, bulletin boards, and direct calls to family members. The communication emphasized the importance of family involvement in improving care quality and encouraged them to attend the first organizational meeting. We invited family members to attend an information session about the council. During this session, the council's objectives were presented, and a Q&A session allowed family members to ask questions and share any concerns. Staff members were also informed about the initiative, and their participation was strongly encouraged. Special efforts were made to explain the council's benefits to staff, emphasizing how it would help them understand family members' concerns and expectations, leading to better cooperation and improved resident care.

To further engage participants, we made it clear that the council would be a **\*\*collaborative, non-hierarchical platform**, allowing everyone to voice their opinions equally. Family members were given the opportunity to nominate themselves for positions within the council, including roles such as the chairperson or secretary[21]

### *Logistics*

The logistics of organizing and hosting the family council meetings were essential for ensuring their smooth operation. Initially, meetings were scheduled bi-monthly to maintain momentum without overwhelming participants. Meeting locations were arranged within the retirement home, in a dedicated community room easily accessible to both family members and staff.

To ensure participation, virtual attendance options were made available to family members who could not attend in person, particularly those living out of town or with busy schedules. Each meeting was scheduled well in advance and included an agenda shared with all participants in advance. This provided families and staff with an opportunity to submit additional items for discussion before the meeting, ensuring that all relevant topics were covered.

In terms of resources, each meeting required projectors or laptops for presentations and note-taking, along with printed agendas, minutes from previous meetings, and feedback forms. A designated staff member was appointed to handle logistical aspects, including setting up the room, providing refreshments, and ensuring that all technological equipment was functioning properly.

### *Challenges and Solutions*

Despite careful planning, several challenges arose during implementation. Initial engagement from some family members posed a challenge. Some family members were hesitant to participate due to time constraints or doubts about the council's effectiveness. To overcome this, we emphasized the direct impact the council could have on the quality of care for their loved ones and encouraged peer influence by having engaged family members personally invite others to join.

Another challenge was resistance from a small number of staff members who were concerned that the council might increase their workload or complicate decision-making. To address this, we organized staff meetings to discuss the benefits of the council, assuring them that it was meant to improve communication and collaboration, not create additional burdens. By ensuring staff understood the council's role and demonstrating its potential to improve their working relationships with families, we gained broader buy-in.

Logistical issues also emerged, particularly when scheduling meetings that suited everyone's availability. Some family members and staff had conflicting schedules, making it challenging to find a time that worked for all. To mitigate this, we implemented a doodle poll system for scheduling, allowing participants to select dates and times that worked best for them.

Finally, as the council grew, ensuring that meeting discussions remained productive and solution-focused became increasingly challenging. Some meetings began to veer into lengthy debates without clear outcomes. To address this, we introduced a mekeeper role to ensure that discussions stayed on track, and we set clear action items with deadlines at the end of each meeting [21-25]

### *Conclusion*

Despite these challenges, the family council at the retirement home was successfully implemented. The careful planning, continuous engagement, and adaptability in overcoming

obstacles contributed to the council's establishment and ongoing success. The project not only improved communication and collaboration among family members, staff, and management but also fostered a stronger sense of community, benefiting both residents and their families. Through consistent effort and problem-solving, the family council has become an integral part of the retirement home's culture of care.

### **Project Analysis, Evaluation, and Recommendations for Family Council at Retirement Home**

#### *Objective:*

The establishment of a family council at a retirement home aimed to improve communication among family members, staff, and caregivers and enhance the quality of care provided to residents. The goal was to create a collaborative platform that would allow families to voice their concerns, share feedback, and work with staff to address residents' needs. This analysis evaluates the project's outcomes, assesses its success, and provides recommendations for future improvements.

#### *Outcome Evaluation:*

The family council's effectiveness was measured based on several key metrics, including improved communication, resident care, and family engagement.

1. **Improved Communication** One of the primary outcomes of the family council was better communication between families and the retirement home's staff. Family members expressed appreciation for the opportunity to meet regularly with the management and caregiving staff. Issues such as meal preferences, activity planning, and care routines were openly discussed, ensuring that staff were better informed about residents' personal preferences. However, some participants noted a challenge with communication between meetings. While the council itself served as an effective communication tool, some family members felt that updates between meetings were less frequent than they would have liked.
2. **Enhanced Resident Care** Families reported feeling more involved in decision-making processes regarding their loved ones' care. Staff feedback indicated that involving family members improved the personalized care provided to residents. The council also allowed

families to express concerns about care and suggest improvements, such as more specialized activities for residents with dementia. Overall, the council played a role in enhancing care by fostering an environment for open discussion.

3. Family Engagement The family council successfully engaged a large number of family members, with participation varying across different families. While some families were very proactive and regularly attended meetings, others were less engaged, which affected the overall diversity of input. The involvement of staff and caregivers in the meetings, however, helped in bridging gaps between family concerns and care practices[26-28]

#### *Feedback from Stakeholders*

The feedback collected from stakeholders, including family members, staff, and caregivers, highlighted both strengths and areas for improvement:

- Family Members Overall, families expressed positive feedback, particularly regarding being heard and having a structured forum to discuss concerns. They appreciated the staff's transparency and willingness to address their feedback. However, some family members suggested that meetings could be more frequent or that there should be more targeted discussions on specific care issues, such as end-of-life decisions or managing chronic conditions.
- Staff and Caregivers. Staff members generally appreciated the family council as it provided a clear avenue for them to understand family expectations. However, there were concerns about the time commitment required of caregivers to prepare for and attend the meetings, which sometimes interfered with their regular duties. Caregivers also noted that not all families participated equally, which made it difficult to address certain issues comprehensively.
- The management team found the council to be a valuable resource for gathering input and ensuring that family members felt included in the decision-making process. However, they acknowledged that more systematic follow-up on the issues raised by families was necessary[29,30].

#### *Lessons Learned:*

Several lessons emerged from the implementation of the family council:

- **Successes:** The initiative improved communication and fostered a more collaborative relationship between families and staff. The family council became a platform for families to voice concerns, express appreciation, and provide input into care plans.
- **Challenges:** One key challenge was ensuring consistent participation. Not all families attended the meetings, which resulted in a lack of diverse perspectives. Additionally, there was a need for better communication between meetings, as some families felt out of the loop on ongoing developments.
- **Improvements Needed:** The council meetings could be made more accessible through digital platforms, enabling families who are unable to attend in person to participate. Additionally, the meetings could benefit from a more structured approach, with clear agendas and action items to enable more productive discussions.

*Recommendations:*

To improve the family council and its impact on both families and the retirement home staff, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Enhance Participation:** Encourage wider family participation by promoting the family council through more accessible communication channels, such as emails, newsletters, and even virtual meetings. This would ensure that more families are informed about the council and have the opportunity to engage.
2. **Increase Meeting Frequency:** Hold meetings more frequently, especially during key periods such as after major care transitions or during holiday seasons. This would help ensure that family members remain up to date and can provide timely input on their loved ones' needs.
3. **Involve More Diverse Groups:** Make a conscious effort to involve a more diverse group of family members, including those from different cultural backgrounds and with varying degrees of engagement. This can be done by offering meeting times that cater to a wider range of schedules and by promoting the benefits of participation.
4. **Focus on Actionable Feedback:** Ensure that meetings are structured with clear action points and follow-up procedures. This will give family members confidence that their concerns are being addressed in a timely and efficient manner. Regular updates on the progress of issues raised in previous meetings will also be beneficial.

5. Utilize Technology: Use digital tools to facilitate remote participation in meetings.

Virtual options would make it easier for distant family members to attend and contribute, increasing overall engagement and ensuring that all voices are heard[31,32].

*Conclusion:*

The family council at the retirement home was an important step towards improving communication and involvement in the care process. While it was successful in several areas, there is room for improvement in participation, frequency, and structure. By implementing the recommendations outlined above, the council can become a more effective and inclusive platform for all stakeholders, ultimately enhancing the quality of life for residents.

Materials Delivered for the Family Council at Retirement Home

*Objective:*

This section outlines the materials and resources delivered during the organization of the family council at the retirement home, which facilitated communication and engagement among family members, staff, and caregivers.

*Documents:*

1. Meeting Agendas: Agendas were provided before each family council meeting to ensure that all attendees were aware of the topics to be discussed. These documents were designed to create a structured environment where issues such as resident care, activities, and family concerns could be addressed efficiently. The agenda allowed participants to prepare in advance, ensuring productive meetings with clear objectives.
2. Newsletters: A monthly newsletter was distributed to all family members involved in the council. This newsletter highlighted key updates on resident care, upcoming events, policy changes, and family council activities. It helped maintain continuous communication between meetings and kept family members informed about any relevant developments at the retirement home.
3. Action Plans: After each meeting, an action plan was distributed summarizing key points raised during the discussion and outlining follow-up actions for both staff and family members. This document ensured that feedback from family members was captured and addressed, creating a transparent process for everyone involved[33,34].

*Training Materials:*

Training materials were provided to both family members and staff at the beginning of the project to ensure smooth collaboration. These materials included:

1. **Family Orientation Guide:** A guide was given to new family members joining the council, outlining the purpose, structure, and expectations of the meetings. The guide also included tips on communicating effectively during discussions and on voicing concerns constructively.
2. **Staff Training on Engagement:** Staff members participated in a training session focused on how to engage with families respectfully and proactively. The training emphasized the importance of active listening, addressing concerns empathetically, and working collaboratively with family members to enhance resident care[35,36].

*Feedback Forms:*

1. **Surveys:** Feedback forms were distributed at the end of each family council meeting, asking participants to evaluate the meeting's effectiveness, the communication process, and their satisfaction with the outcomes. These surveys included both quantitative questions (e.g., rating satisfaction on a scale) and qualitative questions (e.g., asking for suggestions for improvement).
2. **Post-Event Feedback:** After each family council event, families were encouraged to provide informal feedback via follow-up emails or one-on-one discussions with the management team. This feedback helped identify areas for improvement, which were incorporated into future meetings.

These materials and resources were essential in fostering transparency, communication, and continuous improvement in the family council process. By ensuring that both staff and families were well-prepared and informed, the project achieved its objective of creating a collaborative, effective platform to enhance resident care.

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