

# Addressing the Growing Psychosocial End-of-Life Care Needs of Older Adults in Nursing Homes: The Value of Social Work

Mercedes Bern-Klug and Amy Lemke

Needed attention has been directed toward improving the physical care of older adults in nursing homes and other long-term care settings. Much of this care is aimed at healing wounds, bones, and organs. Yet humans are hungry to heal relationships too. Regardless of age or ability, people yearn to grow and thrive emotionally.

Against the backdrop of Erickson's psychosocial development theory and using case studies, in this workshop we will examine emotional and psychosocial challenges that often arise in the context of living and dying with advanced chronic illness in a long-term care setting. We will also examine sources of resiliency among older adults. The workshop includes a presentation of conceptual frameworks that professional social workers use to anticipate, assess, and address unmet psychosocial needs among nursing home residents approaching the end of life. In addition to sharing tools available in the public domain to screen for dementia, depression, and spiritual well-being. We will also share publicly available advance care planning tools which can be used with residents and family members. The workshop concludes with a discussion of the advantages to residents, families, and staff member of having an on-site professional social worker in the nursing home setting.

## **Objectives:**

1. Describe a conceptual framework useful in anticipating, assessing and addressing common psychosocial challenges facing older adults who live in nursing homes.
2. Name and be able to locate three screening tools useful in nursing homes for: dementia, depression and spiritual well-being.
3. Discuss three sources of strength and resiliency among older adults in nursing homes, and how to build on those strengths.
4. Distinguish "advance care planning" from "advance directives" and explain how advance care planning can help enhance the quality of living and dying in a nursing home while also addressing resident and family psychosocial issues related to the end of life.