

Alzheimer Society expresses disgust, deep concern at callous attitudes displayed in online videos

The Alzheimer Society of Ontario reaffirms its belief in and steadfast support of frontline health care workers, including PSWs, the overwhelming majority of whom are selfless, compassionate individuals.

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TORONTO, ON—The Alzheimer Society of Ontario—our staff, Board members, volunteers, and clients—is unified in our shock and disappointment at dehumanising videos being circulated by a small number of Personal Support Workers (PSWs) on social media platforms, including TikTok. The videos exhibit the worst attitudes people living with dementia confront on a daily basis, and for these attitudes to come from someone in a position of care and power is deeply concerning to all long-term care residents, care partners, and families affected by dementia.

A diagnosis of dementia is not the end of a person's independence and individuality. Like all of us, people living with dementia need and thrive on social contact and human connection—both of which have been in short supply over the past year. For anyone, especially a care provider, to belittle and mock that need for connection is hurtful and contributes to the stigmatisation of dementia.

We understand that it was PSWs themselves who identified and called out this hurtful content. This reinforces our belief that PSWs—who have been working in stressful, traumatic conditions since well before the pandemic—are true health care heroes. We hope any care provider who may have seen this content, and shared or agreed with it, uses this as an opportunity to confront their beliefs about dementia, and commits to seeing beyond the disease to form meaningful connections with the person.

In response to numerous messages from concerned staff, care partners, and people living with dementia, Cathy Barrick, CEO of the Alzheimer Society of Ontario, has released the following statement:

I am saddened to learn of these disparaging videos from a handful of PSWs circulating online about people living with dementia. The Alzheimer Society of Ontario has an established partnership with the Ontario Personal Support Worker Association (OPSWA) to provide dementia-specific training to their members. I, as the Chief Executive Officer of the Alzheimer Society of Ontario, reached out to OPSWA to understand the full nature of their involvement and to impress upon them my reaction to these discriminatory and disgusting videos about people living with dementia. I appreciate that OPSWA recognised the profoundly unacceptable nature of these videos and terminated their relationship with the third party responsible immediately.

While this behaviour from a small number of PSWs is alarming, it certainly underscores the critical importance of education for PSWs on dementia and how to provide dignified and client-centred care.

Dementia is a life altering and fatal disease that affects more than half a million Canadians. The importance of having a system in place that can provide dementia-specific and client-centred care is crucial. Everyone knows someone with dementia and, like the Alzheimer Society, everyone should be offended by the videos posted by this account. It should be noted that these videos demonstrate the worst side of the profession, however there are thousands of PSWs who are the backbone of long-term care and community homecare who are outstanding, professional, and compassionate in their care of people living with dementia. It was PSWs themselves who first brought these videos to light, and every PSW I know shares my disgust at this content.

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About the Alzheimer Society

The Alzheimer Society is a Federation of 29 community support providers, operating in every corner of Ontario. We supported over 100,000 clients last year, including both care partners and people living with dementia. We provide education and training to physicians and other healthcare professionals, as well as the general public. With hundreds of staff and thousands of volunteers, we seek to alleviate the personal and social consequences of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, and promote research into a cure and disease-altering treatment.

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