INVOKING SILVERN VOICES IN HEALTHCARE:
TRANSFORMING PRACTICE BY ENGAGING OLDER ADULTS IN COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

By
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Executive Summary

Canada’s population is aging. From 1971 to 2012, the proportion of older adults in the population grew from eight percent to fourteen percent (Milan, 2011). This growing trend will ultimately have an impact on nursing practice as older individuals continue to seek healthcare services. Nurses must be able to work in collaboration with the older population to provide quality care.

In healthcare today, individuals are expected to be participants in their own care. As nursing practice continues to be more inclusive of patients in their care, it is important that we fully understand the perspectives of older individuals to become more active participants. It is essential that nurses gain an understanding of how older individuals perceive their participation in their care so we can encourage and support their involvement in healthcare decisions.

Action research is an appropriate form of inquiry to elicit perspectives on participation in healthcare as this methodology requires both parties being active participants in the study. This action research study explored participative healthcare from an older adult’s perspective. Thirteen older adults, ranging from sixty-six to seventy-seven years of age, participated in this study to share their healthcare experiences, thoughts and advice using semi-structured interviews to provide an enhanced understanding of the participative healthcare experience.

A simple editing analysis style was used by the clinician-investigator to read through the older adult responses and experiences to identify key words and shared patterns of meaning. This study revealed that older adults prefer to be active participants in their care. The major theme that emerged in analysis was true partnership. True partnership means that older adults expect that they work with healthcare professionals as equal partners with a shared care goal to support their health. Three sub-themes that emerged were communication, respect, and trust. These three sub-themes work in unity to
contribute to a healthcare experience that exemplifies true partnerships. This study proposes a definition of true partnership as being open to and inviting mutual communication in an atmosphere that encourages equity sharing of information contributing to respect and the development of trust that results in confident collaboration in care.

“Population aging in Canada is expected to accelerate between 2011 and 2031, as all people in the large cohort of baby boomers reach their senior years” (Milan, 2011). With this growing trend, it is important for nurses to gain an enhanced understanding of health issues concerning the older adult population. Participative healthcare is an important component of care for all people, including older individuals who live in a community setting. It contributes to improved health outcomes and it is vital that healthcare professionals (especially nurses) have an understanding of participative healthcare from an older adult perspective, as nurses often work alongside them in their healthcare. The knowledge and experiences that older individuals shared in this action research study will provide insight into participative healthcare and make a valuable contribution to current nursing literature.

**Keywords:** Participation, older adults, communication, respect, trust, healthcare involvement, collaboration, partnership