



PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE GUIDELINES

Parkinson's Care for Personal Support Workers (PSWs)

Purpose

These Professional Practice Guidelines support Personal Support Workers (PSWs) in providing safe, respectful, person-centred, and effective care to individuals living with Parkinson's disease. They outline expectations, responsibilities, and best practices when supporting physical, cognitive, emotional, and functional needs associated with Parkinson's.

Scope

These guidelines apply to PSWs working in:

- Home and community care
- Long-Term Care (LTC)
- Retirement homes
- Hospitals
- Adult day programs
- Supportive living environments

All care must be delivered within the PSW scope of practice, according to the individual's Plan of Care, and under the direction of the employer and Regulated Health Professionals (RHPs).

Overview of Parkinson's Disease

Parkinson's disease is a progressive neurological disorder affecting movement, coordination, balance, and, in later stages, cognition and communication. Symptoms may vary day-to-day and person-to-person.

Common symptoms may include:

- Tremors
- Muscle rigidity
- Slowness of movement (bradykinesia)
- Balance and gait changes
- Fatigue
- Speech and swallowing difficulties

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- Mood changes (depression, anxiety)
- Cognitive changes in later stages

Core Principles of Parkinson's Care

PSWs must:

- Provide care with dignity, patience, and respect
- Promote independence and autonomy
- Adapt care to fluctuating symptoms
- Communicate clearly and calmly
- Recognize fatigue and allow extra time for tasks
- Maintain person-centred care at all times

Roles and Responsibilities of the PSW

Personal Care Assistance

The PSW may assist with:

- Bathing, grooming, oral care, and dressing
- Toileting and continence care
- Safe transfers and mobility
- Positioning to prevent discomfort and skin breakdown

Care should be unhurried, allowing the person time to initiate and complete movements.

Mobility and Fall Prevention

PSWs must:

- Follow all mobility and transfer instructions in the Plan of Care
- Use prescribed mobility aids correctly
- Encourage safe ambulation where appropriate
- Monitor for freezing episodes and shuffling gait
- Keep pathways clear and ensure proper footwear

Any change in mobility or increased fall risk must be reported immediately.



Nutrition and Swallowing Support

The PSW may:

- Assist with meals according to dietary guidelines
- Ensure proper positioning during meals
- Allow extra time for eating
- Monitor for choking, coughing, or difficulty swallowing
- Report signs of aspiration or unintended weight loss

Texture-modified diets and thickened fluids must be followed exactly as outlined in the Plan of Care.

Medication Support (Non-Administration)

PSWs may:

- Remind and support individuals to take medications as directed
- Observe for medication effectiveness and side effects
- Report “on/off” periods or changes in symptom control

PSWs must not administer medications unless permitted by legislation, employer policy, and appropriate training and authorization.

Communication Support

PSWs should:

- Speak clearly and calmly
- Allow extra time for responses
- Use short, simple instructions
- Be attentive to non-verbal communication
- Encourage expression and participation

PSWs must never rush communication or speak on behalf of the person unless requested.

Cognitive, Emotional, and Mental Health Support

PSWs must:

- Recognize signs of depression, anxiety, or confusion
- Provide reassurance and emotional support
- Maintain consistent routines to reduce stress

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- Report behavioural or cognitive changes to the supervisor or RHP

Skin Integrity and Comfort

Due to reduced mobility, PSWs must:

- Reposition individuals as directed
- Monitor skin for redness, irritation, or breakdown
- Ensure proper hygiene and moisture control
- Report pressure areas promptly

Safety and Risk Management

PSWs must:

- Observe for changes in physical or cognitive condition
- Follow infection prevention and control practices
- Use proper body mechanics and safe transfer techniques
- Report incidents, near misses, or safety concerns immediately

Documentation and Reporting

PSWs are responsible for:

- Documenting care provided accurately and promptly
- Reporting changes in mobility, swallowing, cognition, mood, or behaviour
- Communicating concerns to the appropriate supervisor or RHP

Documentation must be objective, factual, and completed in a timely manner.

Professional Boundaries and Ethics

PSWs must:

- Maintain professional boundaries at all times
- Respect privacy and confidentiality
- Obtain informed consent before providing care
- Uphold ethical and professional conduct

Education and Competency



PSWs supporting individuals with Parkinson’s disease must:

- Maintain current knowledge and skills related to Parkinson’s care
- Participate in ongoing education and training as required
- Seek guidance and supervision when unsure or when care needs change

Conclusion

Personal Support Workers play a vital role in supporting individuals living with Parkinson’s disease. By following these Professional Practice Guidelines, PSWs contribute to safe care, improved quality of life, and respectful, compassionate support that recognizes each person’s abilities, dignity, and individuality.

Resources – Parkinson’s Care for Personal Support Workers

Canadian & International Organizations

- Parkinson Canada – Education, caregiver resources, symptom management tools, and national support programs
- Parkinson’s Foundation – Evidence-based care guidelines, caregiver education, and professional training resources
- World Health Organization – Neurological disorder frameworks, disability support principles, and global best practices