

## What is Frailty?

Frailty is a state of increased vulnerability, with reduced physical reserve and loss of function across multiple body systems. This reduces ability to cope with normal or minor stresses, which can cause rapid and dramatic changes in health.

– Canadian Frailty Network

The prevalence of frailty is greatest in older adults, but frailty may impact people of any age. Over time, stressors have a compounding effect on a person's body and limit the ability to respond to health events. Increased vulnerability and reduced reserve mean that a seemingly minor health event (e.g. infection, fall, visit to ER) can result in significant changes to a person's health status. While a fit person may overcome a minor health event relatively easily, the same condition may cause a person with frailty to experience a delayed or incomplete recovery. The individual with frailty may never completely "bounce back" to their baseline ability to move, think, and complete daily activities following the health event. Similarly, receiving intensive medical treatments for a given condition may increase the risk of delayed or incomplete recovery for a person with frailty. This is why it's important to ensure that frailty is well understood, particularly in the context of health care decision-making.

The Clinical Frailty Scale<sup>1</sup> was developed to provide a standard clinical definition of different degrees of frailty, based on activity level, medical status, and independence with daily activities.

## Frailty-Informed Care

Frailty is now recognized as a strong predictor of health outcomes.<sup>2</sup> At Perley Rideau, we believe that understanding and recognizing frailty is crucial to providing good care. That's why we've developed **SeeMe: Understanding frailty together™**.

SeeMe™ is a program that recognizes and assesses frailty as part of a person's overall health and supports residents and their families to make informed decisions around treatment that may be helpful or harmful within the context of frailty. The program involves a true partnership between the healthcare team and the resident/family in terms of considering the whole person and what matters most to them as an individual. SeeMe™ aims to align care with quality of life goals, with a true understanding of what a quality life means to individuals. "See me" is the heart's cry of our residents: a call to be seen and known during a period of life when they may not have a voice. With SeeMe™, we strive to see residents for who they are, the unique strengths they bring, and the rich life experience they have.

<sup>1</sup> K. Rockwood et al. A global clinical measure of fitness and frailty in elderly people. CMAJ 2005;173:489-495.

<sup>2</sup> Rockwood, Rockwood & Mitnitski. Physiological redundancy in older adults in relation to the change with age in the slope of the frailty index. J Am Geriatrics Soc. 2010;58:318-323.

The first step of SeeMe™ is to understand the person's degree of frailty by completing a Comprehensive Frailty Informed Assessment. This assessment provides a detailed overview of different drivers of frailty, including the major drivers of cognition, function, and mobility, and assigns an overall Clinical Frailty Scale score. Following the assessment, a care conference is held with the person and/or family to discuss the overall health picture and considerations for future decision-making. During this meeting, potential treatment risks are considered in the context of frailty and individuals are invited to discuss their goals, values, and preferences with the care team. There is also ongoing dialogue outside of care conferences, particularly when there are significant changes in the resident's condition. These discussions help the care team support the person and/or family in making informed decisions about the next steps of care when acute health events arise.

For more information on SeeMe: Understanding *frailty* together™ please contact:  
Andrea Liu (aliu@prvhc.com, x2208)

## Major Drivers of Frailty



**Cognition**  
Thinking or mental  
abilities



**Mobility**  
Ability to move in  
different ways



**Function**  
Participation in daily  
activities



**Perley Rideau**

The Perley and Rideau  
Veterans' Health Centre

1750 Russell Road, Ottawa, Ontario K1G 5Z6  
Tel.: (613) 526-7171 Fax: (613) 526-7172

[www.PerleyRideau.ca](http://www.PerleyRideau.ca)