Life-threatening childhood conditions take an immense toll on both ill children and their families. A life-threatening condition is defined as that for which “curative treatments may be feasible but may fail, or a cure is not possible and from which an affected child is expected to die”. For siblings of children with these life-threatening conditions, the uncertainty of the illness progression and changes in their family life may influence how they understand the situation and manage their emotions. Some siblings may adjust well to having an ill child in the family, others may develop adjustment problems over time. These problems may have long-term impact on healthy siblings' overall well-being such as a decrease in health-related quality of life. Despite the challenges that siblings’ experience, the focus of research has often been on parents and the ill child with little attention on the healthy siblings who are also known as the “forgotten mourners”. When siblings are included in research, it is often the parents who are asked to report on the siblings' experience. However, differences between parents’ perception of siblings’ adjustment and how siblings’ themselves perceive their adjustment have been reported. Our scoping review examined healthy siblings’ self-reported experiences and found both challenges and positive experiences in the following areas: family functioning, psychological well-being, social well-being, and coping.

Joanne Tay is a 4th year PhD student at the Lawrence S. Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing, working under the supervision of Dr. Kimberley Widger. Currently, she is examining the coping strategies and factors influencing the adjustment trajectories in healthy siblings of children with life-threatening conditions. Joanne is a Registered Nurse and is working at Emily’s House, a hospice for children. Her research interests are in exploring the experiences of ill children with life-threatening conditions and their families, adopting longitudinal modelling approaches to examine behavioural outcomes in these families, and evaluating supportive interventions for families of children with life-threatening conditions.

This seminar will be recorded and can be accessed within a week at: http://aging.utoronto.ca/
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