

Transforming Nursing Homes

In the culture change movement in long term care we are transforming nursing homes from being institutional to being home again. We are changing every aspect of the nursing home; the environment, organizational structure, decision making capacity of direct care givers and those being cared for. Two leaders in our field have created a schematic to help us understand the progression possible. Dr. Les Grant of the University of Minnesota and LaVrene Norton, MSW and owner of Action Pact culture change consulting developed The Stage Model. The four stages are: institutional, transformational, neighborhood and household. In this article, the transformational model will be delved into.

I think we are all very familiar with the institutional model as it's what we've had since the beginning of nursing home time. Nursing homes built in the 1960's were made to look much like a hospital. The problem is that a hospital stay is temporary while a nursing home stay is what has been come to be called "long term," thus long term care. For a temporary time we are willing to give up things like a comfy room with our creature comforts and the ability to make our own choices about what and when and where. The other problem is that one trades in their ownership of their life and instead the "medical model" takes over. We tell people what to eat and when, what they cannot eat and cannot do. Staff are instructed to follow rigid rules and schedules treating all residents the same, moving them along like widgets on a conveyor belt; Now you get up, now you eat, now you take a bath, now you get therapy, and on and on it goes.

The transformational model seeks to start to loosen up this rigidity. Those we care for are asked their opinion about things. Residents are asked their preferences and they are honored. If one cannot tell us we use exquisite observational skills to learn what one likes and doesn't like. We start to work on building relationship. That is what a family does and what takes place in community. That is how we learn a person's preferences, what they love and what they hate; what makes them them. Another key transformational practice is consistent staffing which means the same staff take care of the same residents. This too contributes relationship-building and for the person being cared for to become well known. Wouldn't it bring a sigh of relief to know your family member or you was being cared for in a relationship-rich environment where you were well known?

Submitted by Carmen Bowman, Owner

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