

## **Bringing Home to the Nursing Home. Democrat & Chronicle Speak-Out Column**

In 1997, a national movement got its start in Rochester when Lifespan hosted a meeting 35 people from around the country who had a passionate interest in transforming the way elders are cared for in nursing homes. From that meeting, the Pioneer Network, now a leading nationwide advocacy organization dedicated to the “culture change” movement was born.

Culture change advocates share the belief that nursing homes should be, and more emphatically *can* be, places that embrace life. They believe, as I do, that elders deserve less institutional, more home-like care with an emphasis on quality of life, dignity, respect, self-determination and purposeful living. The term culture change is sometimes interchangeably used with the phrase “person-directed” care.

In traditional nursing homes – those that have not embraced culture change, most everything is scheduled and regimented. Residents must woken by a certain time. Baths are given at a certain time. Meals are to be eaten at a certain time. Staff input is negligible. Resident input even less. What does a transformed nursing home look like? Sometimes there are physical changes that create smaller “households,” instead of long, institutional hallways. More often there are “experiential” changes that promote person-centered care. Residents can have their favorite chair. A person who took baths for 80 years is not forced to shower instead. Pets can be welcomed. Residents can make a bowl of oatmeal when they want.

Over the last decade, the movement toward culture change has been slow, but steady. A 2007 survey of nursing homes by the Commonwealth Fund found that five percent had completely adopted the “culture change” model. An additional 25 percent said that their nursing home “for the most part” fits the description of a culture change. The study also found that 68% of homes said that the definition of culture change “described their nursing home in a few respects” or not at all.”

Ways to transform nursing homes are varied. Household and “neighborhoods” models abound, and there are the more prescriptive approaches such as the “Eden” alternative and the “Green House” model founded by Dr. Bill Thomas. All approaches emphasize the “home” aspect of the nursing home by adding ingredients that have meaning for residents. Pictures, decorations and furniture in the common areas reflect the lives of the people who live and work within the home. Each individual’s simple pleasures are honored. Staff and elders create a family within the facility where the daily rhythm is determined by the residents. Cross training is emphasized so that all professionals can assist as needed. Love and strong caring relationships matter between everyone that is part of the home.

As I write this during national “Residents’ Rights Week” (October 5-11), I urge you to help change the way we care for elders. Ask about culture change when you are evaluating a nursing home with a loved one – the power of competition is strong! Or log

on to the Pioneer Network's website at <http://www.pioneernetwork.net/getinvolved> to view a short video about how culture change is changing lives, bringing "home" into the nursing home and transforming the ways in which we care for elders. [Words 517]

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Marie Frey is director of Lifespan's Ombudsman Program which trains volunteers to advocate for 10,000 people living in nursing homes in Monroe, Ontario, Yates, Livingston, Wyoming and Genesee counties. The program's goal is to ensure quality of life and quality of care. If you are interested in becoming a volunteer Ombudsman contact Marie Frey at 244-8400, ext. 114.