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## A New Way of Life

### Culture Change in Wisconsin's Nursing Homes

Nursing home care is heading in a new direction that should result in improved consumer satisfaction. The buzz phrases you might hear include "culture change," "person-centered," "Eden Alternative," "natural waking," "five meal plan," "Wellspring," or "resident-directed." The bottom line is the focus is on the consumers, and what they want and need...a trend that is long overdue and welcomed by consumers.

In actuality, the federal regulations for nursing homes have required this focus since 1987 with the passage of the Nursing Home Reform laws. These monumental regulations were based in client rights and required a higher standard of care, with a focus on each individual resident's quality of life. They mandated that facilities "provide the necessary care and services to attain or maintain the highest practicable physical, mental, and psychosocial well-being" in "a safe, clean, comfortable, and homelike environment." Even more ground breaking, the regulations required facilities to "promote maintenance or enhancement of each resident's quality of life" and to provide "reasonable accommodation of individual needs and preferences." This was the first time that regulations acknowledged that quality of care, in and of itself, does not guarantee quality of life.

Over the last 2 decades, nursing homes have worked to meet the Nursing Home Reform laws, and some have succeeded, but mostly in a manner that was regimented and institutional. With the growth of computer applications, care planning became even more generic. This "one size fits all" mentality became increasingly prevalent. Regulations were complied with, but the *intent* of the regulations, to focus on the individual consumer, was lost in the process.

Leaders in the long term care arena, such as the National Citizens Coalition for Nursing Home Reform, the Pioneer Network, the local Ombudsman Programs and conscientious nursing home providers refused to give up, and their perseverance is starting to pay dividends.

Across Wisconsin some nursing homes are becoming much more consumer friendly, allowing residents to go to bed when they want to, sleep until they wake up and have choice as to when and what they eat. Schedules are based on the residents' preference, not what is convenient for the staff. Positive relationships develop between residents and staff that are based on trust, respect and dignity. Instead of a daily routine of rushed chaos, there is calm order.

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These changes bode well not only for the people who live in nursing homes, but also for the people who work there. Caregivers experience improved morale when they are allowed and empowered to provide more humane care. Job satisfaction leads to retention of the best, most compassionate workers. Everyone benefits.

When shopping for a nursing home, ask what efforts they are making to assure consumer choice and have the facility thoroughly explain any initiatives they have to provide resident directed care in a homelike environment. Additionally ask the nursing home to explain how they train and support their staff so the residents experience the best possible quality of life. Consumer demand will help move facilities toward providing care in a manner that is consumer directed and consumer focused; the type of care and lifestyle that we want for our loved ones and that we would want for ourselves.

The Board on Aging and Long Term Care Ombudsman Program is available to help you understand consumer rights and advocate for more humane care and services in long term care facilities. Call (800)-815-0015 for more information.

*By Julie Button, Ombudsman  
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