

The ‘Heart of Their Home’ and the Recreation/Activity Professional

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“Whoever loves much, performs much, and can accomplish much, and what is done in love is done well.”

~ Vincent Van Gogh

“Some nursing homes are just like vacuums. You’re not supposed to breathe fresh air or feel the sun on your face. You’re supposed to be in a place where other people aren’t. A place where you can be controlled every minute. Where you can be watched – kept away from people and the entire world. In a place that is almost always painted white. The color of a blank wiped slate. A place that reduces you, erases the sick part of you and, along with it, the part that makes you human and precious – the part that permits you to feel joy and gives joy in return. A quiet, unchallenging world, hermetically sealed with a thick, black ring around it. A place that doesn’t keep the dangers of the world from you, but your dangers from the world. A place where you can look at yourself in the mirror and see the truth – one that imprisons you for life.” (Antoinette van Heugten, **Saving Max**, p.85, 2010; *italicized words via interpretation, AF Vicari*).

Recreation/Activity Professionals must know, faithfully practice and implement FTag 241 along with its Interpretive Guideline § 483.15(a) – **Dignity**, throughout their activity programs. CMS states, “The facility must promote care for residents in a manner and in an environment that maintains or enhances each resident’s dignity and respect in full recognition of his or her individuality.” The Interpretive Guideline §483.15(a) further delineates the importance of dignity; “Dignity means that in their interactions with residents, staff carries out activities that assist the resident to maintain and enhance his/her self-esteem and self-worth.”

The opening passage from van Heugten is powerfully strong and straightforward; however, its words and message speak volumes with regards to residents sitting in silence each day wishing and wanting more; hoping to be heard and recognized. Residents who don't have the opportunity to feel joy nor give that joy back to others. Residents who have lost their self-worth and self-esteem because they are seen and 'treated' by staff as patients; individuals who don't have anything to offer or bring to the table. And, finally, residents who have lost their purpose and meaning. M.E.P. Seligman (1975) poignantly describes this exact situation that many of our residents deal with on a daily basis. In his book, *Helplessness: On depression, development and death*, Seligman reiterates how residents feel when they discover that their actions have little to no effect on situations, especially those that happen in nursing home settings. What went wrong, but, more importantly, what steps must be taken by Recreation/Activity Professionals, to provide residents with the highest Quality of Life services they deserve?

Furthermore, Recreation/Activity Professionals must be current and up-to-date with F242 and the revised Interpretive Guideline §483.15(b) - ***Self-Determination and Participation***. "The resident has the right to; (1) Choose activities, schedules, and health care consistent with his or her interests, assessments, and plans of care; (2) Interact with members of the community both inside and outside the facility; and (3) Make choices about aspects of his or her life in the facility that are significant to the resident." This federally mandated requirement specifies that each health care community creates a living environment that is, first and foremost, respectful of the right of each resident to exercise individual autonomy regarding what ***that*** resident considers to be important facets of his or her life. Activity Professionals are, and will always be, in this writer's opinion, the health care community's '*Quality of Life Champions*'. Also, allowing this writer both professional and creative license, Activity Professionals are '*The heart of a resident's*

home'. The following quote by Ezra Taft Benson regarding '*mothers*' has significant correlation to the Recreation/Activity Professional's role as '*The heart of a resident's home*'; "Mothers are ones who are kind, sympathetic and gentle with others. They are considerate of others' feelings and courteous in their behavior. They have a helpful nature. Kindness pardons others' weaknesses and faults. Kindness is extended to all - to the aged and the young, to animals, to those low of station as well as the high." This, indeed, reflects the genuine and true nature of a first-class Activity Professional! Activity team members are skilled and trained to actively seek and collect key information from each resident regarding personal and significant interests and preferences (MDS 3.0, Section F). This data helps ensure that health care staff know what brings that exact, specific joy and fulfillment to each resident.

Finally, F248; "Residents have the right to have a choice over their schedules, consistent with their interests, assessments and plans of care." Choice means just that; choice! Self-initiated, in-room, small group and large group activity programming are all important choices that must be determined by the individual resident. We sometimes forget that they, our residents, have the right to choose their own health care schedules consistent with their leisure interests and preferences. Recreation/Activity Professionals should lead the charge in careful, continuous and diligent analysis and evaluation of residents' care plans. This helps show other health care team members that the Activity Department is proactive in knowing and providing each resident's Quality of Life choices; all the time!

Researchers at the University of Toronto's Quality of Life Research Unit define Quality of Life as, "The degree to which a person enjoys the important possibilities of his or her life." Enjoying those important possibilities begins with the most basic principle of choice. Our residents deserve to enjoy the privilege of defining Quality of Life from their very own personal

perspectives. Freedom and choice are important decisions in defining a good life and this begins with the right to choose and refuse. This is where joy and home begin!

The joy of life comes from our encounters with new experiences, and hence there is no greater joy than to have an endlessly changing horizon, for each day to have a new and different sun.

~Christopher McCandless