



## *Activity Programs Supporting Noteworthy Person-Centered Impressions*

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Many senior healthcare communities thrive from the diversity and amazing creativity of their residents. And, as Recreation/Activity Professionals, we are taught to skillfully craft an extensive array of activities and life enrichment programs, so that our residents can explore their interests and expand their horizons. As a result, each resident creates meaning and purpose through personal activity involvement. Nevertheless, Activity Professionals need to continuously re-sharpen their listening skills and remain mindful of each resident's voice. Carefully looking at resident engagement levels, points of interest and contributions is what keeps our programs person-centered and alive!

Effective November 2017 ~ CMS Final Rule for Long-Term Care Facilities (Phase 2)

*“Each resident achieves his/her highest practicable physical, mental, and psychosocial well-being.”*

*CFR 483.25, F309*

The below-listed activity program categories are nothing new to the seasoned Recreation/Activity Professional. However, with further investigation and research, we find new

venues and pertinent data to support our efforts toward the ultimate goal: a resident-centered, person-specific program!

### **Continuous Learning**

Higher education programming may be the ‘perfect fit’ for many residents living in senior healthcare settings. Today’s colleges and universities offer a variety of unique courses designed specifically for seniors fostering personal growth that intrigues and excites them. Offering extension programs and learning academies is another great way for residents to keep current and learn about the latest trends in today’s fast-paced world! More importantly, memories of people coming together reminds us of good reasons to return our education. The process of growing older often isolates individuals from each other. Bringing higher education classes into senior healthcare communities brings us into respectful interaction with all sorts of interesting people and can help invigorate a life by coming together with like-minded others. Research supports continuous learning for today’s seniors. Benefits include improvement of cognitive abilities, rejuvenation of memory, and remaining mentally active. It’s no longer an exclusive privilege for just our independent residents. Assisted Living, Skilled Nursing, Day Centers and yes, our Memory Care Neighborhood residents, deserve choice and first-class education programs, too!

### **Floral Arrangements and Gardening**

Having a resident get his/her hands dirty and take in fresh air might be *‘the’* program that makes a significant and positive difference for that one person! Floral arranging and gardening are therapeutic and provide residents with an opportunity for relaxation and self-reflection.

Furthermore, edible gardening has positive physical impacts for older adults. Some benefits of flower arranging, planting and tending gardens include:

- Enjoyable form of exercise

- Increased levels of activity including mobility and flexibility
- Use of all motor skills
- Improved endurance and strength
- Reduced stress levels
- Stimulation and interest in nature and the outdoors
- Improved wellbeing as a result of social interaction
- Provide nutritious, home-grown produce

Finally, breathing in fresh air and feeling the warmth of sunshine brings both physical and spiritual happiness as our elders learn new botanical skills and find inner peace with Mother Nature.

### **Intergenerational Programs**

“Connections between generations are essential for the mental health and stability of a nation.”

~ Margaret Mead

Inviting local students, pre-school through high school, to visit the healthcare community and join residents for their leisure activities is a win-win for all. In fact, intergenerational programs offer both seniors and students a sense of belonging to the community. Susan V. Bosak from Legacy Project states, *“In those at either end of the life spectrum – the young and the old – you will find striking similarities. We live in a society that values adulthood, and in turn doing – productivity and ongoing activity. The young and the old share a different rhythm. It’s one that focuses not only on doing, but on the power of being. It’s the simplicity of playing with blocks or tending to flowers. The young and the old are most closely connected with the essence of living. They can exist in a moment that’s the grand sum of past, present, and future. Rather than time being the enemy – rushing time or stressing to fit as much into time as possible – time becomes a comfortable companion, a circle rather than a line.”* It is now our turn to move beyond that one-time program or annual holiday celebration.

Making intergenerational programming a daily and meaningful happening at our healthcare communities is a necessary component of a life well lived!

### **Fitness and Well Being**

Seniors need to know and experience that getting stronger and healthier each and every day is part of a successful life journey! Stretching, exercise and movement are all great ways to maintain one's physical health and relieve stress. As Recreation/Activity Professionals, we believe that daily and consistent exercise should be enjoyable. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC 2009) by 2030 the portion of the U.S. population aged 65 and older will double to about 71 million. The growing number of older Americans will put unique demands on public health, aging services and our nation's healthcare system. The CDC suggests that chronic diseases (e.g., cardiovascular disease, stroke, cancer and diabetes) place a profound health and economic burden on older adults, owing to associated long-term illness, diminished Quality of Life and greater healthcare costs. Although the risk of disease and disability does increase with advancing age, the CDC proposes that poor health is not an inevitable result of aging. Health promotion initiatives of the CDC include healthy lifestyle behaviors (e.g., avoiding tobacco use, engaging in regular physical activity, eating a healthy diet) and early-detection practices (e.g., screening for breast, cervical and colorectal cancers, diabetes and depression). This is why we, as Recreation/Activity Professionals, offer our residents a variety of fun, enjoyable and worthwhile classes to join; Strength and Fitness Training, Tai Chi, Swimming and Water Aerobics, Dancing, and the list goes on and on!

### **Fine Arts**

Whether your senior is an artistic beginner or a regular Da Vinci, a budding vocal soloist vs. a Luciano Pavarotti, a first-time actor or an accomplished thespian, and finally a tentative cook contrasted with an accomplished Rachael Ray, having that resident join others or simply

enjoying the fine arts experience for him/herself, artistic exploration is a must in any healthcare community. It is our job to help channel creative and emotional energy into any artistic medium that brings out the inner beauty in our residents. The Society for Arts in Healthcare (2009) cites the following research: *“Arts in Healthcare is a diverse, multidisciplinary field dedicated to transforming the healthcare experience by connecting people with the power of the arts at key moments in their lives. This rapidly growing field integrates the arts, including literary, performing, and visual arts and design, into a wide variety of healthcare and community settings for therapeutic, educational, and expressive purposes. Throughout recorded history, we see evidence that pictures, stories, dances, music, and drama have been central to healing rituals. Today’s renewed focus on humanistic care is leading to resurgence in the knowledge and practice of incorporating the arts into healthcare services.”*

Person-centered care, as it directly relates to activity programming, is truly a fundamental shift in thinking about the ‘nursing home’ and its residents. And, the best way to serve our residents is to keep searching; looking for those unique and exciting ways to provide Quality of Life programming that has personal worth, significant reason and engagement. Our residents deserve our utmost, and it always begins with us!

*“Caring about others,  
running the risk of feeling,  
and leaving an impact on people  
**brings happiness.***

*~ Harold Kushner, Rabbi*