Persons Living in Long Term Care - Sharing Their Life

A Diversity Profile for Staff & Volunteers
Sunnybrook & Women’s College Health Sciences Centre
Patient Diversity
A View of Life in Long-Term Care

It is important for others to understand that we live here—and we’re going to keep living here. We have preferences and routines and things we’re used to. This is our home—whether we’ve been here a year, two years, or ten years. All of us have our own stories and we all approach living in long term care differently. One of our men said that before he arrived here he was prepared that it was going to be his home since he couldn’t live at home any more. He accepted it, from the very first day and with that decision he also decided to make a point of finding out what makes the place tick, who runs it, and where he could fit in. He says he has gotten to know a lot of people and takes part in a lot of activities. In fact, he is doing things here that he has never done before. He said being here has opened a whole new life for him. His attitude is that he didn’t come here to die. He emphasizes “I came here to live—and live I do. I think I fulfill each day to the greatest I can” and finishes by adding “I’m not bitter, I’m not unhappy and I don’t say ‘why do I have to have this debilitating disease?’ I have it...so let’s get on with it.”

In general, we are concerned about three things: the accommodations, the nursing care, and the food. We could all use more space—our rooms are all overflowing with the things that we care about. But we also all live our own lives. For the most part, we are content in knowing that we are in the best place and we try to get the most out of what this place has to offer. Don’t get us wrong... we can find lots wrong with this place, but we are more inclined to see what is good about it—and there’s an awful lot here.

It is important for us to have access to clear, straightforward information. This is especially important for new residents who are just becoming familiar with what the institution has to offer. At first this place can be mind boggling and it is easy to get lost. It would really help if it was common practice to take new residents around, show them where they are, take them down the elevator to the ground floor and tell them where the television is and where the lounge is. Let them know that if they want anything they should ask their nurse. Let them know that this is not just a hospital—it is a home.
We want people to know that we are very active. We have a dynamic Veteran and Community Residents’ Council that represents us to the hospital administration. In addition, every day of the week there is some sort of entertainment or activity that is led by our entertainment or creative arts therapists. The legion branches in our general area are generous in their support of us—providing money for bingo games, special events, picnics, and trips to local branches for entertainment and dinner. The Canadian Red Cross also has a long-standing history of helping us get to appointments within the hospital and providing us with coffee and tea three times a day. As well, we make good use of the library. One of us has written a book of poems that many have enjoyed reading. The important thing for others to realize is that we appreciate access to different ways to cultivate our individual interests including: ceramics classes, woodworking, painting, gardening, choir, and music appreciation groups. In fact, “there is no end to the interests in the place and one need not spend hardly an hour in one’s room all day—if one is able to get out and about.

Every one of us who lives here has a handicap of some sort—so in one sense we are all here for the same reason. But again, we all have our own lives and stories. Even though there are only about a third of us who are able to speak and to get around ourselves—it is still possible for all of us to be exposed to different things. For instance, “two men who take part in the music appreciation class are unable to speak, but they can nod their heads and they can enjoy the music—so they come.”

Aside from a small unit where there are about 70 beds for people from the community, there is another uniqueness about most of us residents in long-term care—we have all served in a war, in some way or another, in a variety of places all over the world. With that shared history, “there is a synergy, there is a unanimity, an esprit de corps that you can’t find anywhere else.... It is kind of like a large family—when the kids fight between themselves, they fight like hell, but let some outsider lay a finger on one kid and that person fights the whole family.” Although we are primarily veterans, it doesn’t mean that we sit and talk about the war all day long...in fact, you will rarely hear anybody talk about the war. We talk about things that are pertinent to our own lives.
Finally, we in long-term care can speak proudly about the garden behind K-Wing. On a tour of the garden you can visit the new gazebo—Place D'Art—where you might find one of us sitting and talking with a visitor. You can stop by the great willow tree—knocked down in May by lightning—and ponder the images carefully carved into the knobs and nubs of its trunk that is now used for wood sculpting right where it lies. The only limit to the possibilities is your imagination. You can meet many of us. Some of us will be gardening, and others will be basking in the sun, savoring the cool shade of the multitude of trees, feeding the birds, or enjoying the visit of a loved one. You will notice there is a feeling of contentedness in the messages given and taken between people in the garden. Some conversations will be animated, while others will be taking place in the absence of words—in the silences between two people comfortable just being together. Walking through the garden, you will be reminded of the words of one of the residents—he said “I came here to live and live I do.” The residents in long term care are living and we would like to remind others not to forget that.

**Wishes Expressed by Persons Who Live in Long Term Care**

- To have staff recognize this is our home and we have preferences and routines that mean a lot to us.
- To have access to clear, straightforward information about our care, treatment, and surroundings.
- To feel staff appreciate that most of us are veterans, but that all of us have our own stories and we each approach living differently.
- To be confident that our concerns about our accommodations, food, and nursing care will be listened to, respected, and addressed.
- To have opportunities to participate in activities which cultivate our individual interests.
- To feel staff appreciate that we are living our lives.