

Cultural Immersion Experience Interviews

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Introduction

For my cultural immersion experience, I chose to immerse myself into the world of older persons in nursing home. My experience was enriching and insightful, which will be further explained. Throughout this experience, I met many wonderful people and experienced many events that are important to this population of people. The agency that I was graciously able to work with is Liberty Ridge Health and Rehabilitation in Lynchburg, Virginia. This agency allowed me to become a part of the residents' lives and the residents were welcoming and open to my questions.

Agency/Organization Interview

As previously stated, the agency that I was able to work with is Liberty Ridge Health and Rehabilitation Center and they are owned by Saber Healthcare Group. The mission statement of Saber Healthcare is: "To provide quality health care to everyone we serve. Working alongside seniors is not just a job - it's a calling." (Saber Healthcare Group, year unknown). This agency is for-profit and provide a multitude of services for seniors, however, most of their facilities are long-term care, which most would call nursing homes.

The types of services that are offered by this facility are, of course, healthcare. They offer a wide range of services to suit the growing needs of this population. They provide resident-centered care that all members of the interdisciplinary team, the resident, and the resident family or representative party are involved in making decisions. Along with the physical care needs of the resident's they provide life-enrichment activities to simulate the mind, body, and souls of the residents. There are dedicated staff members that involved in every aspect of their lives from dietary, admissions, life-enrichment, social services, business office, nursing, and physical, occupational, and speech therapists.

For my agency interviews, I was able to meet with several management staff members to learn about the day-to-day operation of the facility and resident life. The administrator, Brian, was very helpful in answering all questions of the running of the facility. He is very knowledgeable and passionate of his chosen profession. Brian oversees all departments and ensures that the facility is running as a “well-oiled machine.” This facility has eighty-nine beds and offers long-term and skilled nursing care. When asked about the greatest needs of the elderly persons in his facility he stated, “They constantly need us, they rely on us for everything while they are under our care. It is our responsibility to meet their needs and it is difficult to find new resources and find new things for the residents to enjoy.” (Brian, LNHA, 2022).

Also, I had the opportunity to work closely with the life-enrichment professionals that plan the events and daily activities for the residents. Veronica was also very dedicated and passionate about her chosen career as well. I specifically chose to save this question for her expertise because, she knows the residents unlike any other management position in the facility. She stated “The most challenging thing that I have encountered, besides the effects of COVID-19, is keeping them engaged. Constantly working to find something new and exciting to keep their minds active.” (Veronica, Certified Activity Professional, 2022). We continued the discussion into the activities that the residents enjoy the most, which are church and spiritual activities.

When asked about how she addresses these challenges, she mentioned to this writer that she collaborates with other activity professionals. However, she also said that she likes to hear the residents’ feedback. Although, sometimes they can be harsh, she attempts to incorporate as many ideas as she can. There is no better way to know your audience than to ask them. These challenges were present prior to the Coronavirus pandemic.

The Importance of Social Justice

This experience has taught me about the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and their nationally recognized list of Resident's Rights. This is a list compiled of basic rights that people in nursing homes have. According to the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services,

“As a nursing home resident, you have certain rights and protections under Federal and state law that help ensure you get the care and services you need. You have the right to be informed, make your own decisions, and have your personal information kept private.

The nursing home must tell you about these rights and explain them in writing in a language you understand. They must also explain in writing how you should act and what you're responsible for while you're in the nursing home. This must be done before or at the time you're admitted, as well as during your stay. You must acknowledge in writing that you got this information.” (Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, 2021).

These rights are taken very seriously at my agency. If there were to be a rights violation, then an investigation within the facility involving the social worker, nursing, and other administrative people would be opened. If the evidence was substantiated then, the local ombudsman and other people would be come involved.

I had the opportunity to speak with the social worker as well and he was very informative about his role at the facility. The social worker is the resident advocate. Part of the role is to “stand-up” for the resident in any situation deemed necessary. While his role is very involved in resident care, he works with outside organizations as well. Outside organizations including the ombudsman, adult protective services, home health organizations, hospice organizations, and more.

Although elderly people in nursing homes are protected, by law, that does not mean that abuse or neglect does not occur. When speaking with several staff members, they noted burnout. Which is something that anyone can understand, however, when they are unable to perform their jobs to the best of their abilities related to staffing, burnout can become very dangerous. Therefore, there are other organizations that are protective of residents in nursing homes like adult protective services and the ombudsman.

Individual Resident Interviews

As previously stated, I met several wonderful people throughout this experience. The residents welcomed me with open arms into their home and freely spoke with me about the details of their lives. While I was able to work with several residents, I did have to ask staff which residents they felt would be the most competent and able to answer my questions, related to the effects of aging. The staff recommended two ladies who had resided at the facility for several years, related to HIPPA, I will not be sharing any names or other identifying details. I will refer to them as resident D and resident L.

Resident D and L are natives of the Lynchburg area. Both women are strong in their faith and have a passion to serve those around them. The residents are both part of minorities, along with being in a long-term care facility. Resident D was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy at birth and has struggled with the affects her whole life. Resident L is an African American woman who grew up in a time of racial discrimination. These women overcame many challenges and learned wisdom, grace, and compassion throughout their experiences.

The women that I interviewed both experienced oppression in their lives. They both have different experiences, but they are very similar. While resident D experienced scrutiny for her disability and resident L experienced for the color of her skin, they felt the same way. The

residents shared details about school, bullying, growing up in church, and their careers. Resident D stood out in the crowd and attended Liberty University, while it was Lynchburg Baptist College and continued to raise awareness for adults with disabilities. Resident D was a stay-at-home mother to her eight children and was a beloved member of her community.

Residents lived “normal” lives when it came to celebrating holidays and other celebrations. They continue to be involved in the activities in the facility that best suit their needs. The women enjoy the Bible studies, Sunday morning church, special dinners with live music, and the visits with their families. One thing that both residents mentioned was about the COVID-19 pandemic and how it had affected their daily routines. In the beginning of COVID, the residents were not allowed visitors for infection control purposes. One resident mentioned to me “I felt that I would never see my family again and that was scary.” I can only imagine the pain and worry these people felt in those uncertain times. However, since then, they can have visitors and are able to be taken out of the facility with family for events.

My emotional reaction to these interviews is powerful. I have always been told that I “have never met a stranger” and I am honored that these women allowed me into, some of, the most personal details of their lives. For me, these interviews changed my perspective on older people in nursing homes. Not only, did I not know much about the day-to-lives, however, I never realized that the lives these people live continue with them once they enter long-term care.

Based upon these interviews my knowledge grew vastly, which lead to my research and wanting to learn as much as possible. Throughout this whole experience, particularly with the interviews and personal interactions, I connected with people on a different level. The people I encountered during this project helped me understand that I am on the right track with my own personal career choices.

Gracism, is acting in a way that reflects Christ, (Anderson, 2007), which I feel that I have learned a tremendous amount through this experience. I have seen the love of Christ through these people and the love they had for one another. Throughout our supplemental reading in this course *Gracism: The Art of Inclusion*, one idea the author touched has changed my outlook on viewing others. Anderson mentioned early on in our reading about how everyone has their “dots.” These dots are things that people cannot change like race, sexual orientation, weight, ethnicity, etc.

The author uses his personal example of how he has been discriminated based upon his dot. He is an African American man living in Chicago and he was pulled over by law enforcement four times in one afternoon. One can assume that this was based upon the color of his skin and his dot. I relate this to my experience/interviews because I can often find myself making unintentional assumptions. Throughout this course and this experience, I am training myself to avoid what media and popular opinion is about people who are different from me. The two women that I interviewed from this experience both have dots they cannot change, however, I could still see Gracism within them.

Summary of Experience

The similarities I noticed throughout this experience is that the older people in this long-term care facility are all there for similar reasons. This is not a place that they chose to be, when we think about our retirement and later years, most of us would not consider wanting to be admitted to a nursing home. They all have different backgrounds and life experiences; however, they are alike in their current situation.

Some surprising things that I learned are more personal things about myself and what I am capable of. The people that I have met throughout this experience have opened my eyes to

becoming more gracious and kinder. Personally, I always felt I am very accepting and kind to others, but as previously stated, I can make unintentional assumptions. I strive to be more like the people that I have met in this experience because they show grace, kindness, love, compassion, and are acceptance of others.

I have learned many insightful things throughout this experience. Things that I will be able to use in my future career as a school counselor. Although this is not the age range of individuals I will be working with, I feel that what I have learned from this generation can assist me in the future working with younger people. This experience has taught me patience and most importantly to see through the eyes of others.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this experience has been enriching to say the least. The knowledge that I have gained from both the agency and the residents I will continue to use throughout my professional career. I have been able to apply the ideas learned in this course, particularly through out Gracism readings. My experience had changed the way I view others and now I am working to seeing the world through the eyes of others. Although this was a difficult tasks, this is something that I will continue to use in my career as a school counselor.

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Cultural Immersion Project

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Introduction

The purpose of this project is to experience individuals of different multiculturalism's. For this project, I have chosen to immerse myself into the world of older adults in nursing homes. This population of people I had special interests in because of my relationships with my grandparents and other older adults in my life. My grandfather is currently in end-stage dementia and is residing in a local long-term care facility. While I frequently visit him, I had not seen the daily lives of the other residents. Throughout this project, I have learned that older people in nursing homes continue to live a normal life, or at least a new-normal. We will be divulged in this research by the key characteristics of this population, common beliefs, and values, as well as, common customs, practices, and behaviors, and more.

When researching this topic, I found a beautiful and inspiring quote by former First Lady of the United States, Eleanor Roosevelt, "Beautiful young people are accidents of nature, but beautiful old people are works of art." Personally, I found this to be inspiring because, as people age, their bodies change. As I have learned from this experience, many of the older people in the long-term care facility are self-conscious and want to look the best possible. Also, throughout this experience, I have learned about these generations gracious and beautiful personalities, mannerisms, and souls, which will be discussed in further detail later.

Key Elements of Older Adults in Long-Term Care Facilities

Just in my short time with the residents I learned that most of these people are classic. By classic, I mean that they are proper and timely. This could be in relation to their generational norms and the era of time in which they "grew-up." Most older adults are modest and do control their tongues. I saw this not only in this experience, but from my grandparents. They are

different than other generations, like mine. My generation is very open and most do not have the discipline of these older adults.

During my time with these older adults, I was graciously given the opportunity to observe and assist with their activities, where I learned most about the residents. In long-term care facilities there are dedicated professionals that are there for the sole purpose of keeping the residents' bodies and minds active. However, through my own research and discussion with professionals, family involvement is powerful when it comes to the continued health of these individuals.

Research supports the value of family involvement for those in nursing homes, not only does it benefit the residents' psychological needs, but their physical needs as well.

“Researchers were clear that an underlying motivation for family members to be involved was located in their self-expectation to promote the physical, social, and psychological well-being of their relative, and this was achieved in a variety of ways.” (Puurveen, et. al, 2018). This article continues to discuss the findings of the families' perspectives “First, family members structured their visits around activities that promoted connection to past routines. Second, family members nurtured their relatives' relationships beyond the NH—by taking their relative on outings or sharing stories about family and friends. Third, to promote person-centered care, families shared their knowledge about relatives' life story, preferences, and values with staff. Finally, some family members voiced the importance of being involved in decision making about everyday care.” (Puurveen, et. al, 2018). The importance of this research is that this population of people are family oriented and enjoy seeing their families when they come to visit and when they do visit it is very beneficial.

Some common attitudes and beliefs that I was able to observe the daily lives of these residents. Part of their daily lives was every Sunday morning, residents would have a church

service, provided by a local church every week. This facility included two different denominations of Christianity, to better suit the residents' needs. During my experience, I learned that people of this population are generally religious and spiritual people. Again, this could be directly related to the generational norms, although, some do not fit into their generation. These people value family and as previously stated, they enjoy talking about family and particularly enjoy when they can come visit.

However, with the recent Coronavirus pandemic, visitation was stopped in many long-term care facilities. The halting of family visitation was difficult for the residents. One explained to me, "I felt my family was being taken away from me." Not only was this hurtful to hear, I could not help but not to understand how they felt. When the pandemic first started, my family was still allowed to see my grandfather for visitation, related to him being on hospice. I could only imagine the pain and fear these residents felt when they were told they could not have visitors with no end in sight.

Common customs, practices, and behaviors are related to spirituality, family importance, and the timeless ideals. This population has strong spiritual/religious roots. This was observed in the daily lives of my experience. Not only do they have church services on Sundays, but they have Bible studies and musical groups throughout the week. Research supports the prominence of religion for this population

"Research has shown that religion, spirituality and/or belief are intertwined with health, well-being and quality of life, particularly with regards to how people deal with ill-health and other challenges they might face. Indeed, Koenig notes that it is only in fairly recent times that religion has become disconnected with healthcare, despite the influence it can

have on medical decisions, the kind of support structures available, and the capacity to cope with ill-health.” (Malone, et. al, 2018)

The religious activities are not only the ones that most residents enjoy the most, but beneficial for their overall health as well. Timeless ideals are defined as not restricted to a particular time or date. (Meriam-Webster, 2022). Prior to this experience I thought of elderly people as classy and timeless, those thoughts have been verified.

A few key historical events that this population has experienced are the Vietnam and Korean Wars. They have also witnessed major historical movements and changes withing The United States like the Civil Rights Movement, multiple presidencies, and more. During my tie with the residents of the facility, I met many veterans of the Vietnam and Korean Wars. The presence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder often was left untreated in the early stages. Most veterans who served in this war were not welcomed home with the assistance for mental health needed. This left this population of veterans without help from the Department of Veteran Affairs. According to a study conducted by the National Vietnam Veterans Longitudinal Study, “While NVVLS findings confirm that the majority of Vietnam theater Veterans are both mentally and physically healthy, a significant number are still suffering from PTSD symptoms and other chronic health issues related to their service.” (Department of Veteran Affairs, 2015). However, now there are services and other opportunities for these veterans.

Historical and Current Oppression

Historically this population of people in long-term care settings has a dark past. Before current rules and regulations in place, people who entered facilities were treated poorly and did not have the rights as residents do now. Currently, nursing home resident’s rights are protected under state, and federal guidelines. A copy of resident’s rights should be listed and available for

all to view in the facility. These rights are outlined by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services or, CMS. According to CMS:

“As a nursing home resident, you have certain rights and protections under Federal and state law that help ensure you get the care and services you need. You have the right to be informed, make your own decisions, and have your personal information kept private.

The nursing home must tell you about these rights and explain them in writing in a language you understand. They must also explain in writing how you should act and what you’re responsible for while you’re in the nursing home. This must be done before or at the time you’re admitted, as well as during your stay. You must acknowledge in writing that you got this information.” (Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, 2021).

CMS outlines the basics of the rights of a nursing home resident and each state has individual guidelines as well.

The rights of nursing home residents have not always been protected. Not until the National Nursing Home Reform law was enacted in 1987. This new law specifically outlined the rights of residents and how to file a complaint. Along with resident’s rights, it also provided guidance that facilities should have adequate staff-to-patient ratio and other standards of care. This law ensured the safety and well-being for individuals in nursing homes. Also, for the formation of advocacy agencies like, long-term care ombudsman and American Association of Retired Persons. (AARP, 2001).

Events

For this project, I attended several activities and was able to observe the day-to-day lives of these residents. The two events that I will focus on are the church services and the special music/dining Easter event. As previously stated, the facility has planned with local churches for

residents weekly. I also had the privilege of being a guest at their yearly Easter dinner and music night. These events helped me realize the characteristics, values, beliefs, and more of older adults in nursing homes.

During church service, the residents were able to partake in typical Sunday morning services. They praised The Lord with traditional hymnals, passed communion, and had a traditional sermon. I was able to see the strong faith and passion of these residents. During their Easter dinner and music night, I saw the power of prayer and love of God in these residents. They were uplifting and very social with their fellow residents.

Emotionally, these events moved me. Partially, because of the relationship I have built with them, but to see the true, raw passion they have for The Lord and another, was enriching. I was able to engage with the residents and speak with them as they were my own family or even as friends. They were all very welcoming and accepted me with “open arms.” I have previously stated that I have always felt drawn to this population of people, related to relationships with grandparents, but through this experience I have gained much more respect and understanding for these people.

Three key things that I learned about this population is that all the things that I had believed in the past are true. This is a generation of caring, passionate, and loving people. I learned more about the rights of the people in a long-term care setting and the events that led up to the protection they have today. I also learned how the family unit is valuable to these people and how it is beneficial for their overall health to have their family or family like people helping them.

Among counseling theories, the two that best apply to this population of people are those of person-centered and family systems. For residents in a long-term care facility their care is to

be patient centered, as outlined by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Being patient-centered means that all decisions regarding the care or well-being of the resident are not to be made without resident consent. Their care could involve physical, emotional, psychosocial, or other needs in their daily life. As far as the counseling theory of being family oriented. I have previously stated and cited research that supports the crucial part families play in the lives of nursing home residents.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this project has allowed me to investigate the world of older adults in nursing homes. When starting this project, I did not think that I would find the people and experiences I did. Truthfully, I expected this project to be rather difficult to accomplish, as I chose a difficult topic. However, I was pleasantly surprised. I learned through this experience that older adults in nursing homes are just as much people as those who are not in a facility. They do not lose the freedoms they would typically have outside of the facility. I learned about their passion for family, Christ, and the experiences that this generation has endured.

This experience has enriched my overall view of people in the world. I have learned to look at a person in their entirety and not based upon the things they cannot change. I am assured that this experience will help me in my future career as a school counselor. I can now learn from others and I am able to make myself aware of other's background, life experiences, and stories.

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