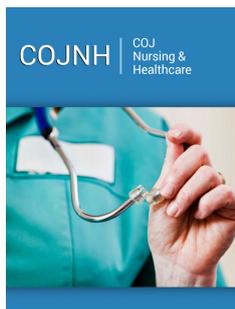


The Influence of Experience as a Volunteer in a Nursing Home

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Opinion

The year that was marked for us by the fear of the pandemic COVID -19. Each of us dealt with it in our own way. As an occupational therapist and lecturer, I did my work from home online. I devoted my non-work time to volunteering at a nursing home. This experience shaped my thinking and I saw the pandemic experience through the eyes of the residents and their families.

A decade of working in a nursing home as an occupational therapist familiarized me with the fact that the elderly were the most vulnerable group and needed the most help during the government shutdown and complete lockdown, as they were trapped behind the walls of the facilities and movement in or around the home. So what was left for them was to use the phone and make calls as much as they had and knew how to use. Socializing with relatives who are not skilled in the use of modern telecommunications technology, no one cared. And the others? The warmth of the staff, listening to their day to day problems, sadness, lack of understanding and no insight into the situation, sadness, despair, depression and introversion. Every day the same answers from the staff to all the questions related to the walk, the inclusion of a meaningful activity, being with peers and new friendships.

All that had disappeared overnight. There were endless days that balanced each other, unrecognized personnel due to protective clothing, incomprehensible and difficult communication, and unspoken non-verbal communication, the desire to socialize and shorten the endless hours of the day.

On the other hand, relatives who had no contact with their loved ones were concerned. They depended on staff to call the resident, the workload and congestion increased while they attended to basic needs such as personal care, nutrition, and meals. In an effort to brighten these awkward moments of daily life, they left bags of store-bought goodies with personal messages, written thoughts and well wishes with the receptionists. But none of this could make up for the feeling of loneliness and alienation from relatives and residents of the home, even though the staff made every effort to deliver all the packages and read all the encouraging thoughts meant for them, their beloved mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, uncles and aunts.

All of this makes me wonder if the government regulations really had to be so strict and prohibit our seniors from any socialization even within the home with their seniors while maintaining insulation with the external environment.

Last but not least, immobility and being forbidden to move outside the room has been the undoing of many an elderly person. We are aware of the fact that old age brings with it certain physiological, psychological and social changes, which have been aggravated and exacerbated by the pandemic measures and in many cases prevent people from living with dignity and enjoying their lives.

This casts doubt on the appropriate decision-making strategy for such a vulnerable group and leaves open the question of whether similar strategies will be used in future pandemics to prevent the spread of pandemics, conscious of the impact on the quality of life of vulnerable groups that older people have certainly experienced or will experience. Facilities that facilitate such measures live in a safe environment and take into account the wishes and habits and needs of older people in terms of living with other residents.

We can hope that despite the various oppositions during the pandemic, the government will get ideas on how to optimize the well-being of older people in nursing homes [1], how to put staff in distress [2], how to prevent the effects of social isolation of older people [3] and how to adopt the use of therapies to provide satisfaction to older people in nursing homes and their relatives.

I hope that health workers have learned a great deal and have realized that in future we will have to learn to live with such trials and that we will use the knowledge we have acquired for the benefit of vulnerable groups, of which the elderly are certainly one.

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