

THE POSITIVE INFLUENCE OF A NURSING CULTURE ON A SENIOR LIVING COMMUNITY

Margaret Crowley RSM, PhD

I live in a happy place. The other residents, like me, are aging in place as best we can. While there may be trips to the doctor and sessions of physical therapy from time to time, there is ample time for fine dining each day and a multiplicity of activities to fill our days. The residents are pleasant and the staff is wonderful. I live at Brookdale, West Palm Beach.

Brookdale West Palm Beach is a senior living community comprised of independent living apartments and assisted living apartments. Residents in the independent units have access to personal living services and home health care as needed. This type of community is not strange to me. My experience includes developing and managing a senior living community in the early nineties. I have always had an interest in elder care and ways of creating an environment which supports aging with meaning and satisfaction for all. I recognize something special here at Brookdale West Palm Beach. That special care and concern starts from the moment a person makes an inquiry about living here.

Marketing staff are welcoming and genuinely interested in what situation will best fit the inquirer's needs and desires. During the application for residency each person is interviewed by a nurse and the person's medical history and current health status is reviewed.

Once the person is accepted the Resident Services Director, who has a clinical background, engages with the person for the move-in preparation. The Resident Services Director greets the new resident upon arrival to the community and orchestrates the orientation of the new resident. She arranges for a Resident Ambassador to welcome the new resident a few days after the person has settled in to the apartment.

As residents age in place there are periodic health care needs which may call for some personal living services, physical therapy or home health care. All of these services are available on site.

With diminishment in residents' health, visibility of adaptive equipment like walkers and scooters, and the appearance of personal living attendants, physical therapists and nurses one might expect the environment to be challenging, and maybe even depressing, for both the more able and less able residents. On the contrary, I find the atmosphere in the community to be one of optimism, community support and joy. My reflection on the spirit that I find here led me to wonder how the philosophy of caring impacts this community so positively.

I received permission of the Executive Director to interview key Associates to discern how the atmosphere of love and concern is able to be so pervasive in such a large community.

Here are some of the conclusions I draw from my conversations with Associates in leadership positions within the community and from my daily interactions with residents.

AWARENESS

Each resident is known as an individual from the very beginning of the application for residency. Because a nurse is engaged early in the process, the resident feels known in ways more than just their financial viability to live here and their personal desires about aging in a secure welcoming environment. Great care is given to the move-in process. Having someone with a nursing background connected to this adjustment time is reassuring to the resident and the resident's family. Moderate anxiety and the stress of settling in to a new home are understood by all the staff.

As life goes on for the resident, there is awareness by staff of any changes in resident demeanor or behavior. When concerns are expressed at Management Team meetings the awareness of the people with health care backgrounds means that a wellness assessment can be made immediately. Each team member can be made aware of the

best way to handle the needs of that particular resident. Early supportive action for the resident can prevent more serious developments and give the resident enhanced quality of life.

COLLABORATION

This leads me to a great appreciation of the collaboration which is a hallmark of the staff here. We know that the residents are their primary concern. It is evident in all their interactions with us and in the way they speak of the residents. For the Associates being here is more than a job. Associates may refer to their role as a “passion”, “being passionate about patient advocacy”, “having a servant attitude”. They view residents as if they were “family”.

One symbol of that collaboration is the way the Management Team become the servers of the food and beverages at the gathering for Theme Night each month. All of them in the same common area, serving us as we listen to the entertainment inaugurating the theme evening, shows visibly what we sense every day –that they all care about us. Another symbol is the great care and attention all Associates give to the preparation of the Seder. Seeing the staff so happy to be sure the residents were having a beautiful Seder was a sign to me that these preparations were done with loving care.

HEART CENTERED CARE

Jean Watson, a noted nursing theorist (Watsoncaringscience.org) refers to the nurse/patient interactions as *Caring Moments*. Erie Chapman, founder of the international Loving Care Movement, (eriechapmanwebsites.com) describes these interactions as *Sacred Encounters*. These caring moments could describe all the interactions between Brookdale Associates and the residents. I believe this way of relating to people with care and compassion is integral to the nursing profession. People with a nursing background intuitively relate to the whole person – body, mind, spirit – and intend their engagement with the resident to result in giving the resident hope and joy. In our daily conversation with Associates I sense a ***focused, compassionate presence***. Residents know they are the top priority in this community

and that all Associates are endeavoring to assist us in having a vibrant, life-giving community experience. Might it be that the nursing culture which is the background for several of our key leaders elicits from all of the team their deep human compassionate caring and allows them to manifest that heart centered care freely? I believe it does.

Here I awake each day knowing that I am receiving care in my home from people with generous hearts, competency in their areas of responsibility, and a spirit calling forth peace and tranquility as I enjoy my life in this community.



Margaret Crowley RSM, PhD is a retired educator and management consultant. Her previous article on senior living, “Living Longer and Better than Expected”, appeared in HEALTH PROGRESS, December 1992.

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Interview Guide -- Nurses

Thank you for participating in this interview. I am interviewing you for the "Brookdale is a Special Place" article. This is an inquiry about what makes Brookdale so special among senior living situations and how to amplify the positive aspects of life here. We are going to find out about your experiences of success here at Brookdale so we can build on those experiences.

These reflections will help us move forward and continue to make this Brookdale Palm Beach retirement community the best place to live fully among caring people. Your input is an important contribution to generate meaningful ideas and actions.

When the interviews are complete, everyone's input will be synthesized to identify qualities and loving care that make us unique. I'm going to take notes as we talk.

Topic One: The Privilege of Nursing / Working in a Senior Living Community

The nursing profession is based on caring. Nurses blend scientific knowledge with intuition, compassion, and understanding. For the professional nurse, the privilege to participate in the healing relationship is what creates and maintains the passion for nursing. We would like to acknowledge that passion and explore with you how you acknowledge and develop this in all of those who work at Brookdale West Palm Beach.

1. What were your hopes and aspirations when you chose nursing as a profession?
2. What is it about nursing **today** that keeps you involved?
3. The privilege of caring for others has sparked in many of us the passion of nursing. --Describe a situation in which you felt this passion. Please tell me the story.
4. Please describe an outstanding and positive work experience at Brookdale.

Topic Two: Appreciation

All of us yearn for fulfillment through meaningful work. The most gratifying appreciation is that which is expressed from the heart by active communication, a kind gesture or written words.

1. Please tell me about a time in which you felt extremely appreciated here at Brookdale.
2. What are one or two meaningful ways your contribution is recognized & appreciated?

Topic Three: The Exceptional Team

An exceptional team is built on individual expertise and excellent collaboration. Cooperative teamwork, clear communication, and wisdom are essential elements in delivering superior care.

1. Describe a time when your expertise truly made a difference to the team.
2. What makes your management group an exceptional team?
3. What are three things you most value about this team?

Topic Four: The Uniqueness of Brookdale West Palm Beach

Imagine you are representing Brookdale in accepting a national award for "Excellence in Caring in a Senior Living Community" in 2017.

1. What will you tell everyone you most appreciate about your role at Brookdale West Palm Beach?
2. What makes nursing practice at Brookdale unique?

Topic Five: The Future

What three wishes do you have to make Brookdale the best caring environment both for living and for giving care?

Interview Guide - General

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These reflections will help us move forward and continue to make this Brookdale Palm Beach retirement community the best place to live fully among caring people. Your input will be an important contribution to generate meaningful ideas and actions.

When the interviews are complete, everyone's input will be synthesized to identify qualities and loving care that make us unique. I'm going to take notes as we talk.

Topic One: The Privilege Working in a Senior Living Community

The nursing profession is based on caring. Nurses blend scientific knowledge with intuition, compassion, and understanding. For the professional nurse, the privilege to participate in the healing relationship is what creates and maintains the passion for nursing. In your role at Brookdale you contribute to the caring environment that the nurses are addressing with each resident.

5. What were your expectations when you chose to work in a senior living community?
6. Please describe an outstanding and positive work experience at Brookdale.
7. Tell me of a time or an activity in which you felt you were a partner to the nurses in this community.

Topic Two: Appreciation

All of us yearn for fulfillment through meaningful work. The most gratifying appreciation is that which is expressed from the heart by active communication, a kind gesture or written words.

3. Please tell me about a time in which you felt extremely appreciated here at Brookdale.
4. What are one or two meaningful ways your contribution is recognized and appreciated?

Topic Three: The Exceptional Team

An exceptional team is built on individual expertise and excellent collaboration. Cooperative teamwork, clear communication, and wisdom are essential elements in delivering superior care.

4. What makes your work group an exceptional team?
5. Describe a time when your expertise truly made a difference to the team.
6. What are three things you most value about this team?

Topic Four: The Uniqueness of Brookdale West Palm Beach

Imagine you are representing Brookdale in accepting a national award for "Excellence in Caring in a Senior Living Community" in 2017.

3. What will you tell everyone you most appreciate about your role at Brookdale West Palm Beach?
4. What makes nursing practice collaboration at Brookdale unique?

Topic Five: The Future

What three wishes do you have to make Brookdale the best caring environment both for living and for giving care?