

POLICY FORUM

Quality of Long-Term Care: Nutrition as a Critical Dimension

Introduction

Gordon H. DeFriese, PhD, and Kristie Weisner
Thompson, MA

Issue Brief: Nutrition and the Dining
Experience in Long-Term Care: Critical
Indicators of Nursing Home Quality of Care

Polly Godwin Welsh, RN-C

*“Finding the balance
between medical/
nutritional need and
resident preference is
an on-going effort
of nursing home
staff that requires
individualized
attention, creative
thinking, and shared
decision-making
between staff and
residents and their
family members.”*

COMMENTARIES

So, Who's Complaining about the Food?
Ombudsman Perspectives on “the Dining
Experience” in North Carolina's Nursing Homes
*H. Harvin Quidas, Twilla Chavis, Aimee D. Kepler, and
Nancy Murphy*

What's New in Long-Term Care Dining?
*Nadine A. Pfeiffer, BSN, RN, Denise A. Rogers, Michelle R.
Roseman, NHA, MBA, Leslie C. Jarema, NHA, Aimee
Reimann, NHA, and Debbie Combs-Jones, MT, MHA*

May I Serve You, Please?
Ted W. Goins, Jr.

The Dining Experience in Nursing Homes
*Beverly A. Speroff, RD, LDN, Karen H. Davis, RD, LDN,
Kristen L. Dehr, MS, RD, LDN, and Kate N. Larkins, MS,
RD, LDN*

Fluid Intake and Hydration: Critical Indicators of
Nursing Home Quality
Robert J. Sullivan, Jr., MD, MPH

Creative Hydration Programs
Lanaya Cunningham, RD

Regulating Food Service in North Carolina's
Long-Term Care Facilities
Cindy H. DePorter, MSSW

A Physicians' Perspective on the Dining
Experience in Long-Term Care
Christopher M. Herman, MD, CMD

Nutrition in Advanced Alzheimer's Disease
Heidi K. White, MD, MHS

Use of Feeding Tubes in the Care of Long-Term
Care Residents
Timothy S. Carey, MD, MPH

INTRODUCTION

Policy Forum: *Quality of Long-Term Care: Nutrition as a Critical Dimension*

Over the next decade or two, the American healthcare industry will experience a dramatic shift in focus as the nation's older adult population grows rapidly—especially the population beyond age 85. There will be unprecedented pressure on the long-term care field as more of our population living to these advanced ages is no longer able to live independently for reasons of physical or cognitive decline. This demographic transition, and the service demand likely to come with it, has created a growing concern that skilled nursing facilities may not be prepared for these mounting expectations.

In addition to our expectations for skilled nursing facilities to provide medical and nursing care of the highest technical level, these facilities are expected to make every effort to provide a residential environment that is safe, nurturing, stimulating, and, wherever possible, like “home.” Unfortunately, no nursing home, regardless of the quality of care provided or the staff efforts to make the facility pleasing and comfortable, is ever “just like home.”

An aspect of nursing home care most frequently mentioned by residents and families is the quality of the food and dining services. In this issue of the *North Carolina Medical Journal*, we have invited some of North Carolina's most knowledgeable individuals in long-term care to examine the challenges and opportunities for addressing food/fluid intake/dining issues in skilled nursing facilities. Polly Godwin Welsh, RN-C, Director of Regulatory Systems for the North Carolina Health Care Facilities Association (NCHCA), has written an Issue Brief outlining the many facets of this important dimension of long-term care quality. A number of Commentaries (by physicians, nurses, dietitians, regulators, and advocacy personnel) describe the complexities and difficulties of meeting the expectations and nutritional needs of nursing home residents follow the Issue Brief. The Commentaries were organized by members of the Quality Standards Work Group, a legislatively mandated, interdisciplinary group that has been working on a wide range of issues related to quality of care in North Carolina's nursing home industry for three years.

No one in our state, regardless of their economic situation, should think these issues have little relevance to their own future. Few of us will escape the necessity of dealing with the availability or quality of long-term care. As we face these matters in our own lives and in the lives of our loved ones, they seem of utmost importance. Yet, the discussion of quality of care definition and measurement in long-term care has received relatively little emphasis in health policy deliberations.

North Carolina is fortunate that NCHCFA, our state's nursing home trade association, has embarked on a monumental effort to make the nursing homes of North Carolina the “best in the nation.” As part of this effort, NCHCFA is making food consumption and dining (and attention to fluid intake and hydration) key components of their expanded effort to change the total experience of long-term care residence.

We hope that by describing these issues, Journal readers will appreciate the challenges facing this healthcare sector. We also hope that this issue will prompt policy makers and other stakeholders to begin working together to prepare for a future long-term care delivery system that will have the capacity to provide high-quality care for the many who will need this level of service.

As always, we invite our readers to comment on these articles in future issues of the Journal.

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