



Patients Thrive In 'Day Care' Suite

A new program at a Wisconsin facility is providing a calming atmosphere for a small number of aggressive patients with dementia.

WHEN JULIE SCHWENNSEN first joined the nursing staff at Dove Healthcare Nursing & Rehabilitation in Eau Claire, Wis., she noticed a pattern that she'd seen before during her years as a registered nurse (RN) in long term care. The facility's dementia unit, though well staffed in a traditional sense, was not set up to deal effectively with some of the more aggressive and disruptive patients, who seemed to require more personal attention.

In sharing this observation with Director of Nursing Joey Pettis, RN, Schwensen offered a bold proposal to remove some of these patients from the unit for up to 10 hours each day and have them spend that time in a separate "recreation suite," where they could receive more one-on-one attention from staff.

Implementing An Idea

Ultimately, Schwensen's recommendation sparked a dialogue at the facility, which resulted in a staff inservice on quality of care for aggressive patients with dementia. The idea of creating a separate recreation suite for patients with dementia eventually caught the attention of Administrator Jim Deignan, who embraced the notion. The question was where would the special suite be located?

There appeared to be insufficient space on the facility's second floor, which houses the dementia unit. But

the facility's third floor, where the pharmacy and inservice classrooms are located, contained enough raw space to create a day care suite for a limited number of patients.

With authorization from Dove's owner Tommy Davidson, a 692-sq.-ft.

area with original illustrations. The artistic contributions to the suite by Gausman and her collaborator, Kristin Sosalla, are evident immediately upon exiting the elevator on the third floor. A series of quietly colorful murals

guides visitors down the hallway to the quiet corner reserved for the Dove's Nest, and the theme of nature repeats itself inside the recreation suite. Gausman explains the work by noting that she and Sosalla were seeking "a peaceful home setting, bringing into play nostalgia in an old-fashioned motif that calls to mind gardens."

The result of the comfortable furnishings, colorful illustration blended into the environment, and an expansive view from a bank of windows has created a reassuring atmosphere, according to Activity Director Jan Cornell. "We're observing a reduction in fear because of the more intimate environment," she says. "It's as if each of them is going home for the day."



Member of Dove's Nest activities staff chats with patient.

area was carved out to house the experimental program. The job required some \$16,000 worth of construction to create what came to be known as "The Dove's Nest," a special area where six patients with diagnoses of dementia spend their waking hours each day.

Original visual art plays a big role in the Dove's Nest's decor. Deignan retained Kris Gausman, a professional illustrator and graphic designer, to complement the remodeled third-floor

Achieving Independence

In drafting the mission statement for the Dove's Nest program, Pettis, Schwensen, and their colleagues outlined 12 visions for the program, including providing improved quality of life for patients; promoting a feeling of belonging; providing a fun atmosphere; decreasing or eliminating dis-

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ruptive behaviors; decreasing or eliminating physical and chemical restraints; maintaining or increasing level of independence; maintaining or increasing cognitive function; providing a quiet, nonstimulating environment; assisting families in coping with changes that occur to their loved ones; providing enjoyment for patients, their families, and staff; providing insight and educational needs to staff in caring for patients with Alzheimer's; and providing a structured environment that is conducive to providing the highest quality of care.

"This is a program with full-spectrum staffing that offers patients a higher degree of independence than they had on the dementia unit," says Pettis. "Interestingly, those in the program have learned to function more independently as a result."

Schwensen notes that the project has also been educational for staff. "The program has achieved one of its objectives by providing a broader understanding among staff at all levels of the requirements of working with patients with dementia." Ten staff members were initially educated to provide care for Dove's Nest patients, she says.

"I'll admit that it is still too early for a study to demonstrate results scientifically, but I can tell you we are seeing very positive outcomes in the one-on-one nursing environment," says Schwensen.

Positive Results Reported

One of the first things Schwensen and Pettis have observed is a decrease in falls. One patient, for example, had five falls during a four-month period prior to entering the Dove's Nest. During the first four months of participation in the new program, that patient had no falls. There has been a parallel decrease in the use of wheelchairs and so-called "merry walkers." This greater mobility, Schwensen points out, leads to greater strength and balance, resulting in fewer falls.

Another vision in the Dove's Nest mission statement is to "assist families in coping with changes that occur with their loved ones." Betty Rossiter, the daughter of patient Mayson Taylor, says she sees evidence on her regular visits that the program is achieving that objective and more.

"Dad gets a lot more one-on-one attention in the Dove's Nest," Rossiter says. "He's not as agitated overall as he was, and he doesn't repeat himself as much. It's a homier atmosphere. Usually, when we visit, we sit around a table with him and the aides, and we all have a conversation. He doesn't always have a lot to say, but he certainly seems more content."

Slowing Cognitive Decline

Decreasing or eliminating inappropriate behaviors such as aggression and wandering are also key visions of the program, as is slowing the decline of patients' cognitive functions in areas such as incontinence, Pettis says, noting that Dove's Nest participants are selected based on recommendations by staff, who assess the probabilities for patients' success in self-help.

"There are things the Dove's Nest participants can do now that they could not do before entering the program," says Pettis, ticking off a list that includes simple eating functions, making choices, writing letters to family, doing housekeeping chores, initiating conversation among themselves, and showing hospitality to visitors.

Kate Burgess, daughter of Dove's Nest participant Mary O'Brien, says initially her family was hesitant to approve the change, knowing it would be another disruption for O'Brien. But since they have consented to try the program, O'Brien has thrived.

"We are very pleased with how much more outgoing Mom has become in the Nest. She is even flirtzy," says Burgess. "She was never a winker, but now she winks at people. At home, she was used to a quiet atmosphere like the Nest. It has helped her find calm

within herself again. Mom spent a week in the hospital earlier this year. One of the aides in the Nest told me that when she returned, she said, 'It's good to be back home.'"

A Typical Day

The 10-hour day at the Dove's Nest begins at 7:30 a.m. with a half-hour of greeting and welcoming, followed by breakfast for an hour. After the participants attend to personal care needs such as toileting, a half-hour is devoted to mid-morning exercise. Following that, snacks are served, and participants finish their morning with relaxation during which the lights are dimmed and the patients are encouraged to rest in recliners or nap on one of the two beds provided. Following the rest period, the patients are afforded another opportunity to take care of toileting needs, followed by the noon meal. Participants spend the afternoon enjoying activities such as card playing, perusing or sharing photo albums, playing word games, or socializing outside in the facility's courtyard. This is followed by relaxation and a music session at 3:30 p.m. After supper, participants and staff reflect on the day and bid one another farewell for the evening.

"The residents in the Nest are like a family," Burgess says. "When I go visit for supper, I can sit down with the group and the aide, and the physical setting is almost like being at home."

Presently, the Dove's Nest has six participants, but Pettis says they are projecting an increase to seven. At first blush, that may not seem terribly dramatic until one recalls how one measures success in the daily life of a patient with dementia. "It's one step at a time," Pettis says. "One confident step at a time." ■

For More Information

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