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## Making it OK to sleep late

A Chicago nursing home joins a movement to treat residents more like people, not patients

July 16, 2010 | By Barbara Brotman, Tribune reporter

The revolution at the Bethesda Home and Retirement Center began with sleeping in.

Letting people sleep late may not sound subversive. But in the traditional world of nursing homes, which for decades have been run like highly regimented mini-hospitals, it is a radical change.

And when Bethesda made that change two years ago, it was taking its first step to join a movement that hopes to transform the nation's nursing homes.

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The "culture change" movement seeks to get these facilities to alter their physical layout and their caregiving practices to create homelike environments where residents are seen not as passive recipients of care but as individuals with control over their lives.

Nursing homes that embrace the new philosophy are letting residents decide when to bathe, eat and sleep; allowing them to organize their own activities; and redesigning nursing units into small "households."

Advocates say residents in such homes are happier and healthier; the employees have more job satisfaction; and giving care this way even costs less.

And baby boomers who need long-term care will expect no less, said Julie Boggess, chief executive officer at the Bethesda Home, on the Northwest Side. "I became an adult in the late '60s; I'm real accustomed to doing things my way, and I'm not very apologetic about it," she said.

She doesn't even like to speak of "allowing" residents to sleep late. "It's not for us to give them that freedom," she said. "They should have it."

But until Bethesda began adopting culture change two years ago, they didn't. And at many nursing homes, they still don't.

The idea is not new. The Pioneer Network, a national umbrella group of nursing home providers and consumer advocates, has been promoting it since it was formed in 1997.

Yet only 25 percent of the nation's nursing homes say they have "for the most part" embraced culture change, according to a 2007 survey by the Commonwealth Fund, and only 5 percent say they have done so "completely."

Nursing home operators, who are under tremendous pressure to cut costs, are often afraid that culture change would be too expensive, said Robert Mayer, president of the Chicago-based Hulda B. and Maurice L. Rothschild Foundation, which supports culture change. In fact, he said, flexibility is more cost-efficient.

And there is little pressure from consumers, he said; there are so few "culture change" homes that most people don't know they exist.

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