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Culture Change in Practice

Life on Campus

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"Culture Change in Practice" is our own weblog where people can become involved in a conversation about Culture Change as it is practiced by professionals in real nursing homes. Feel free to join the conversation, or post a comment about something you have learned on your journey.

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I haven't been on my soapbox in a while, however, this time I'm on it so I can reach in and stir the pot. Basically, I'm looking for an answer to, "Why do you think that is? And why has nobody challenged it?" Here's the issue at hand:

I've often thought life in a nursing home in many ways is like life in the college dorms and campus. They are environments constructed by an organization for people of a specific age group (generally) and a specific situation. Living in these environments, you have a roommate who you very likely did not know before you got there. There's the dining room and cafeteria. And pretty much everything you need is right on campus: drug store, library, places for socializing and entertainment such as movie theater, coffee shop or recreation center, a place to worship, laundry, clinic, security, etc. The major stuff like taking care of the landscaping and green space, cleaning of common areas and general building maintenance are taken care of as well. (And talk about departmental silos-but that is getting off the point.) The idea is that the burden of the chores and errands of daily living are lessened so that focus, time and attention can be spent on other things. In college, it is studying, of course, and in a nursing home, it is the things that take a little

more time and effort than they used to.

However, we know that for college students, time spared from daily tasks is also spent on those "new life experiences" and, well, having a good time! Why should it be different for those living in nursing homes? Of course, new experiences and having a good time means very different things to people in their twenties as opposed to folks in their eighties, but it seems so odd for me that in these very similar environments, one inspires activity and growth while the other centers on function (or dysfunction). I don't think it is the age of the people living within. I think it is the expectations we all have about what is supposed to go on there. In fact, it seems the expectations should be reversed. College kids are going to grow and be active on their own, they don't need a special environment for that. What they need to do at that stage in life, is learn to function in the "real world." Whereas, elders are pros at functioning in the real world, but are not in a time of life we generally think of as full of activity and growth like our twenties.

What do you think? How can we change the expectations of what living in a nursing home should be to match the richness of the college experience?