
CONCLUSION

The administration's focus on residents' independence, freedom of choice, as well as encouraging staff creativity and innovation played a strong role in creating the new health center. Alexian mission statement drove the design goals for the new facility. The questioning and reinterpretation of the codes were a result of the creative team assembled at Alexian Village. It is hoped that this story of innovation center will encourage others to consider all the factors and be prepared to make a commitment to provide a true therapeutic environment for the elderly. This monograph set out to achieve four major goals.

Four goals of this monograph

Communicate that an institutional setting for older person is interaction of the three dimension of the organization, the individuals and the setting

Demonstrate the role of the physical environment as a therapeutic tool

Demonstrate the importance of the preparatory process in creating a facility for older persons

Demonstrate the awards of constant analysis and evaluation.

These four important issues should be summarized in the conclusion to conceptualize the value of this monograph.

Alexian Village set out to create a therapeutic environment. In order to do so they had to manipulate the three dimension of individuals, organizational influences and the physical environment. An institutional setting for the elderly is thus considered to be an interaction of these three dimensions. For instance, the goal of the health center is to retain residents independence, dignity, autonomy, and control of their own lives. Without consideration of individual's characteristics, the services provided by the health center may not meet residents needs. The goal is thus hard to achieve. Without consideration of the physical environment, personal territory is hard to be defined and institutional atmosphere is difficult to be improved. One example of all three dimensions is the Dining Room. Alexian wanted to provide a more residential atmosphere and increase staff efficiency while promoting resident independence. The organization had to change to a waitress style of dining and be willing to only use the room for the primary purpose of dining. Individuals had to be accommodated by providing tables suitable for wheelchairs, appropriate silverware and plates. The setting was manipulated by making the room different from the rest to make the setting special. The room was zoned for smaller groupings of residents. The room was also large to encourage residents to park their wheelchairs and dine. Bathrooms were located near the dining room for resident needs and staff efficiency. All three of these dimensions working together have created a better dining experience.

The second goal was to demonstrate the role of the physical environment in creating a therapeutic environment. The goals of this therapy is encourage the residents' sense of value. This sense of value can be conceptualized through an individual's independence, privacy, dignity, meaning, status, memory, and pride. The efforts to provide a familiar residential setting and to minimize physical barriers are important therapeutic goals for the setting. A familiar residential setting is hoped to provide cues about activities of daily living for confused residents. Efforts were made to use residential fixtures and finishes which are found in typical homes. The environment was also customized to the elderly changing needs. The larger rooms were critical to allow residents to operate wheelchairs independent of staff. Bathrooms were laid out to make sure that resident could easily use these areas with minimal staff assistance. In these cases the environment is playing a key role in allowing the resident to remain independent.

The third goal emphasized the importance of the preparatory process in creating a facility for older persons. Alexian Village researched existing facilities and reviewed studies of the elderly before thinking about designing the facility, Staff and resident were involved to get as much feed back from the users of the space. A strong mission statement and goals also dictated what Alexian expected from its new health center. However Alexian not only reviewed micro factors of the existing environment; for instance, site benefits and constraints, budget, the served populations profile, and staffing issues, but also the macro factors of political arena. Alexian used several innovative approaches to get their

project approved. Advanced research paid off by being ready to respond to state regulators issues quickly. By involving residents in the process, lobbying the state was much more effective and widespread. It is doubtful if the facility would have been approved by the state if it was not for the well thought out arguments by staff, residents and consultants who were involved in the design of the new building.

The last goal emphasized the importance of continually evaluating the facility. It is well accepted that “time” is one all-pervading factor which influences the environmental quality (physical, social, and interpersonal environments) and residents’ residential expectations, preferences, needs, and lifestyles. To have a true measure of “getting better” or “life satisfaction” among the elderly in a nursing home, evaluation must be a continuous process. This is something that comes naturally to Alexian since it constantly reviews its staff for suggestions to improve the existing facility. With so much time and effort put into creating the new facility, Alexian wants to make sure it continues to provide high quality of care. Since the innovative facility did not come with an owners manual it takes time to educate staff about therapeutic ways to use the cluster. Upon learning that cluster living rooms were not used frequently by residents, Alexian is implementing activities for small groups in the living rooms during the day. They hope that these activities will increase cluster use. The cluster design not only allows the building to be flexible to the changing needs of the facility but also provides opportunities to conduct comparative research. Alexian continues to do research in the building to test various therapeutic approaches to

Alzheimer's care. Alexian also shares the results with other facilities by attending various conferences attended by other care-providers and facilitators.

It is hoped that this story of innovation will encourage creation of other therapeutic environments for the elderly. Although the process of implementing innovative ideas in environments for the elderly is a difficult one, which would involve challenging existing codes as well as norms, the positive results resulting from such endeavors clearly indicate it is well worth the effort.

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