

THE PRIORITY PROGRAM

In the past the philosophy of the care of the Aged was primarily that of custodial care, patients were given shelter, a dry bed and were fed, but the spirit was generally neglected and the aged were allowed to sit beside their beds deteriorating mentally and physically until total regression set in. The resident became indifferent to food and finally had to be fed. He became too weak to walk, and had to be lifted in and out of bed. Incontinence set in, and gradually he lost touch with reality and lived in a world of fantasy. Very little activity and entertainment was given them -- they were fortunate if they had an occasional bingo game, a movie, or some entertainment.

This was not enough because the residents were not involved in the "doing". They were denied the feeling of accomplishment and the "need to be needed". Pride and human dignity had been lost, and they found themselves in the downward spiral toward complete dependence.

Before the remotivation program can be initiated, the staff must recognize and be convinced of the need for this rehabilitative care of the aged.

An optimistic attitude must permeate the facility. The staff should always have a positive view to the potential of the resident. The goals towards independence can be attained through determination, perseverance, hard work, and creative ingenuity. The atmosphere must allow for growth of staff and resident alike.

When we started our program we had seventy-one ladies in various stages of this regression; in the main the majority had serious impairment.

Our first step was to strengthen their bodies, so exercises were started to meet the needs of the individual. To add pleasure, exercises were done to music. Thought provoking games were also introduced with short periods of discussion on familiar topics.

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Gradually as strength was increased they all graduated to a higher level of mobility. For so many, they no longer needed to be confined to their chairs with restraints, they were now free walkers with a new found freedom to explore. Some who had been bed patients were now pridefully manipulating their walkers. Strength is gained every day; immobility is no longer their crippling enemy.

Pride and self esteem had to be instilled, so a beauty bar was introduced. Attention was paid to their hair. A new perm and make-up does much to enhance the ego. We hope to further stimulate the mind by making appointments so that the resident must remember on her own, to attend. A new wardrobe was added with attention to the shoes and "Voila" our ladies were beauties and they felt it with each compliment.

Social graces in eating had to be taught. For many they had lost the desire to feed themselves and had regressed to being fed osterized food. The spoon was introduced again and finally with much patience, they were able to eat a regular diet at the dining room table. As they improve they graduate to a higher level of dining room in which some effort is made to daily stimulate them with new interests while eating.

For so long our residents had not participated in any constructive hobby or passtime, there was tremendous apathy toward crafts and games. We felt we had to give them a purpose and what better way to do it than have them adopt the Solarium children. The most reluctant came forward when favors were made for the children's trays, for the different festive occasions.

As they gained in strength mentally and physically, we attempted to widen their horizons. We felt that cooking would be, perhaps, most familiar to them, so instead of buying birthday cakes we began by having the ladies participate in baking and decorating the cakes. When they finally had their own

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kitchen they were no longer limited and with a highly motivated bachelor, (staff) the ladies began teaching him to cook. The first attempt was a delicious Irish Stew. Vegetables were prepared; the ladies were all eager to peel them. However, no one touched the onions. The next was a roast chicken dinner. To these occasions some of the staff were invited and they came dressed for the occasion. Uniforms were dispensed with -- tables were set in a festive manner with place cards, and a head table for the honored guests. The ladies were the hostesses. Such pride and happiness!

To further enlarge their horizons we took them to see the Park in a Tally-ho, a carriage drawn by horses. They once more saw the ocean, the beautiful park and many scenes which were familiar to them. The ladies now were debutantes and needed to get out into the community. When the community realized this invitations came forth and our ladies were taken to various teas and functions, and came back invigorated and strengthened with the effort that had been exerted.

We were also able to show them that V.I.P. people do care, by having the Lieutenant Governor and his wife attend a function. Their gracious concern was much appreciated.

We encourage sports to instil a competitive spirit. We have many games including shuffle board and bowling. A tournament is most stimulating especially if time is given to establish rivalry.

In order to become more and more a part of community life we entered a float in the parade, during the fair. The ladies spent many hours making the flowers and garlands to decorate it. They were rewarded for their effort by winning a trophy. "Gay Nineties" was the theme, advertising the front of the float as Groovy Citizens. The ladies who rode on the float were dressed the part and were extremely elated.

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Now, the ladies had to show their appreciation so they hosted the senior citizens of Greater Victoria to the "Golden Age Fest", at which the eldest man (90) and eldest lady (96) were crowned, King and Queen for the day. Dignitaries were present; radio, television and the press were on hand to lend importance to the occasion.

They were also introduced to nature again with cook-outs and picnics. While out walking, one completely regressed resident with severe mental impairment, surprised the nurse by refusing to walk any further. When coaxed, she pointed to a sign that said, "Do not enter". Another day she named a rose and a robin. This lady has shown tremendous improvement in the past few months.

Instead of the large monthly birthday parties celebrating all the birthdays, we now have individual birthday parties and the staff organizes a gala occasion. Cards are signed -- messages are sent. In this way we found that many could again sign their name and read messages. On one occasion the staff brought crystal and wine for the toasting. We do try to make these very festive.

We also meet the spiritual needs by having religious services for which the residents dress in their "Sunday Best". This is followed by singing and is always enjoyed.

Music was one of the first beneficial therapies. To the surprise of the staff, one completely regressed resident sang "O Clementine" from beginning to end and again "I like to spoon by the Light of the Moon". The wonder of it all is that these severely regressed residents can participate in a meaningful way (e.g. baking a pie) and all this has been accomplished in such a short span of time -- in just one year.

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Every day we shower these ladies with love; they are so dear to us and we let them know it. They have responded to this spirit of affection with a new awakening. One lady who was often severely violent now actually laughs, smiles every time you look at her, and purrs with contentment. At one time she suspiciously hoarded her treasures; now she delights in sharing them.

We attempt to have a gay relaxed atmosphere so as to foster growth within the remotivation program, for the residents and staff alike. The program will only succeed if the staff is highly motivated and they must have tremendous creative ingenuity for "Change must be the name of the game" because growth can only be obtained by providing continuous stimulation.

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