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Resources for Nursing Home Professionals

## Culture Change: Foundational Principles for Nursing Homes

The terms “culture change,” “person-centered care,” and “person-directed care” are often used interchangeably when referring to nursing home care that focuses on relationships and people instead of regulations, policies, and procedures. This FastFacts discusses foundational principles associated with the culture change efforts underway in nursing homes throughout the country.

Efforts to change the culture of care in hospitals and nursing homes have been developing over the past 25 years beginning with Planetree in the 1980s. It wasn't until Dr. Bill Thomas's Eden Alternative in the late 1990s that a culture change model for nursing homes took shape. As a nursing home medical director, Dr. Thomas saw daily evidence of loneliness, helplessness, and boredom. He developed a cure to the three plagues with the Eden Alternative model, a total shift in care that placed relationships at the forefront and made residents and their caregivers the decisions-makers about aspects of care. His ideas and efforts spread beyond upstate New York and there are 300 nursing homes in the United States working to adopt the Eden Alternative model.

The Pioneer Network, a nonprofit group formed in 1997, supports nursing home leaders embarking on transforming their organizations and encourages a commitment to their principles. The Pioneer Network's principles hold that “community is the antidote to institutionalization” and “relationship is the fundamental building block of a transformed culture.” Clearly, people, both the elders and the staff who care for them, are given priority status in the new culture.

The Pioneer Network encourages us to know each person. As a result, nursing homes that embark on the culture change journey are challenged to allow caregivers to know the elders as people and to see them as human beings beyond their ailments. One of the Pioneer's stated principles is to put the person before the task. As caregivers develop relationships with the elders they are able to do just that.

The state Quality Improvement Organizations led by Quality Partners of Rhode Island has created a culture change framework of six domains that affect elders' lives in nursing homes:

1. **Care practices:** Create an organization redesigned to respond to resident choices about food preferences, recreational activities, bathing schedules, and other daily routines.
2. **Environment:** Work on the de-institutionalization of the environment and encourage elders to bring in their personal items that reflect their individuality, such as refrigerators, calendars, pictures, and comforters.
3. **Workplace practice:** Establish relationships as the number one organizational priority and support the necessary changes and adjustments that will allow relationships to flourish personally, organizationally, and environmentally. Consider the organization of staff and move toward adopting consistent assignments; a peer mentoring program; and the creation of communities or “neighborhoods” within the facility. Provide opportunities for leadership development and strive to become a true learning organization. Finally, care for the staff by offering social support for their needs while providing consistent recognition and praise for compassionate care.
4. **Leadership practice:** Leaders can create a climate that supports the full empowerment of workers and allows them to grow, direct, and affect the care of elders. To be effective, leaders must consistently be visible and engaged with staff and project a positive force.

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5. **Family and community inclusion:** Invite families to make a commitment to become part of the facility's community by providing realistic dates and times for them to attend care conference meetings. Have regular community meetings and invite families, residents, and the staff to hear updates and participate in decision making.
6. **Regulatory:** Bring regulators into your culture change journey by providing your district office with updates of your changes while maintaining compliance with regulations. Engaging regulators in your change process may feel risky and like you are "asking for trouble." Keep in mind that regulators also work hard to ensure residents get quality care. And remember, as the Pioneer Network states, risk taking is a normal part of life.

Nursing homes are complex organizations. Moving away from the institutional model of care is challenging. However, many nursing home leaders have already begun and are ready to offer their suggestions to assist their peers.

One of the foundational first steps is the implementation of consistent assignment of staff to the same residents. Family members and the residents judge the "quality" of care in a nursing home differently than providers. In fact, studies have repeatedly confirmed that residents and their family members value the quality of the relationships they have with the front-line caregivers higher than the quality of the medical care and the quality of the food.

Organizations with consistent assignment of the staff foster relationships. Consistent assignment allows caregivers to develop a knowledge base of individual resident's preferences. Clearly, it means a lot to the residents and their families when staff members are aware of preferences for certain foods or beverages, like taking tea with milk and sugar. Such gestures may seem small in their execution but they are huge in their absence.

More FastFacts available at [www.chcf.org/fastfacts](http://www.chcf.org/fastfacts).

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### Web links

The Eden Alternative [www.edenalt.org](http://www.edenalt.org)

Pioneer Network [www.pioneernetwork.net](http://www.pioneernetwork.net)

Action Pact [www.culturechangenow.com](http://www.culturechangenow.com)

Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute  
[www.paraprofessional.org](http://www.paraprofessional.org)

Planetree [www.planetree.org](http://www.planetree.org)

Medicare Quality Improvement Community  
[www.medqic.org](http://www.medqic.org)

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