



May 2016 Commitment to Care Quality Topic

The Voice of Experienced Care Givers- Workforce Wisdom and a Long Term Care Legacy

In order to glean lessons learned from two truly committed LTC staff members who have made working in the nursing home their life's career, I traveled to San Antonio to speak with two individuals who have served a combined 92 years in the same facility. I'm talking about Sharon Wright and Mae Ware, who both started as nurse aides and became certified when the requirements came into effect. Since then, Ms. Ware was encouraged by one of her supervisors to advance her education and knowledge and become a Certified Medication Aide, which she did several years ago and is currently working in that capacity.

So what's so special about these two ladies? And why can we learn a little something from them?

Consider they have worked at the same nursing home for 43 and 49 years respectively, which accounts for nearly a half century each worth of experience. They have seen administrators and DON's come and go--more than they can count. They have witnessed numerous residents rehabilitate and go home and have been there to comfort residents who have passed on. They have devoted time to training others in the art of compassionate and effective skilled nursing care and benefitted from training themselves. They have made friends and shared their own experiences of family life, the good times and the tough times.

I was truly overwhelmed to be in their presence and hear their insightful and humbling comments.

No doubt their daughters felt the same as they listened every day to stories of their experiences at work and how much they love their residents. As a result, they have all chosen to follow in their mothers' footsteps in the healthcare field. There are now three

generations in Ms. Wright's family who have worked in long term care. Her mother was an LVN in the nursing home where Ms. Wright spent the first seven years of her career.

Even more remarkable is the fact that these ladies are still on the job today at the proud ages of 68 and 78 respectively (by the way I had permission to share their ages). Some might say they have seen it all and probably have the experience to "run the place".

I had the opportunity to gain valuable insight and this is what they said:

"What characteristics would you say make a good co-worker?"

Both Sharon and Mae talked about **PATIENCE**, with everyone--residents, other co-workers, and families. They explained that this was a critical quality because every resident is different and every day is different.

Also, a good co-worker will work along with you no matter what the task is and not grumble and complain. He or she is willing to go the extra mile with you.

"This work is like being in a marriage and managing a household," said Sharon, CNA with Diversicare. "In a marriage you have to be patient, kind and respectful, and there are many jobs that you might not want to do in the house but you do for your family. Working in the nursing home is the same. We all have our jobs to do."

Mae also talked about the benefits of having a co-worker she could learn from and one who was willing to be taught.

"What qualities make a good Charge Nurse?"

Again both ladies had similar thoughts. They said that the best were those who were **APPROACHABLE** and who they could approach with any concerns or issues.

Sharon explained that she needed to feel trusted by the charge nurse and in turn, trust him or her.

“A good charge nurse comes and checks on you and the residents,” said Mae, CMA with Diversicare. “And they pitch in and help whenever they can.”

“What does it take to be a great administrator?”

Sharon talked about how an administrator needs to be a **GREAT COMMUNICATOR** and able to talk to everyone. He or she needs to acknowledge people and get to know the staff. An administrator needs to have the ability to convey appreciation and have open communication even on a personal level when appropriate.

“A great administrator acknowledges ‘who I am,’” stated Sharon.

Mae conveyed that administrators should show they are willing to do whatever is needed if their skills allow. She fondly recalled an administrator from the past who came in one morning when the cook was sick and proceeded to start cooking breakfast for everyone.

“What about the assets of a great DON?”

Again even though my interviews with Sharon and Mae were conducted individually, they echoed each other that a great DON is **VISIBLE** and does rounds on the floor regularly to check on the residents and the staff.

When Sharon was asked what she loves the most about her job she responded by saying that when residents call her by name and acknowledge that she helps them, it makes her feel proud to be a Certified Nursing Assistant.

Mae responded by saying that she loves being with her residents and helping them. However, at age 78, she looks forward to retiring in September when she will have worked in LTC at the same nursing facility for 50 years. No doubt this will be a great loss to her facility and the long term care profession.

Leave Footprints and Others Will Follow:

Felecia Washington, the Director of Clinical Operations for the Diversicare nursing facility where Sharon and Mae work, had a DON in her family line. Her grandmother Willia Barnes raised her and taught her a few clever insights Felecia says have served her well in her career as a nurse and in life:

- Never sleep past 6AM because the world will pass you by.
- The word CAN'T should never be part of your vocabulary.
- Take good care of others because one day somebody will have to take care of you.
- Dress the way that you want to be addressed.
- Excuses are the skills of the incompetent.
- Once you become someone's boss always be fair. (The most your employees can expect of you is that you're fair because a fair person operates above the line all the time).
- Never get a "honey" where you make your money. (Lol)
- The sun will rise and set everyday but it is what you do between those hours that is most important.

You may not have staff who has worked in your facility for 40+ years, but you can use the practical wisdom shared by Sharon Wright and Mae Ware to shape the way you see long term care and those with whom you work.

More Words of Wisdom:

No matter what your role remember to:

- Have Patience
- Be Approachable
- Trust and be trustworthy
- Be Visible and Willing to go the Extra Mile
- Communicate
- Recognize Others for their Hard Work
- Tell Others about the Profession you Love
- Encourage Others to Attain their Goals

**THCA would like to thank Sharon and Mae for their Words of Wisdom
and wish them both well!**