

A Family Council That Works

BY CONNIE SMITH

Finding the best nursing home for a loved one is very difficult process. Upon initial consideration, all that seems relevant is a clean, inviting atmosphere with an attentive and loving staff. Careful research, however, reveals that there are other important issues to consider.

Specifically, look for the presence of an active family council—a very important criterion in evaluating a nursing home. Look at whether a council exists and also assess its level of activity and influence. The nursing home we choose, Greenhurst, has a family council that is active both within the home and throughout its community.

The Greenhurst Family Council had a positive influence on our initial adjustment after placing our son. Its influence has continued by providing an understanding, knowledgeable and trustworthy sounding board for all our concerns, suggestions and questions regarding having our son live at Greenhurst in Charleston. Because I am a member of a group with a common denominator, I have felt a sense of belonging and security.

The Greenhurst Family Council meets monthly to plan projects and talk about how things are going at Greenhurst. This grants us all the opportunity to gain support from each other and to possess the power to suggest or make changes. The Greenhurst Family Council does not seem to be a threat to the administration because they provide places for the council to meet and cooperate with the council's programs and ideas. Kris Schaeffer, administrator and co-owner of Greenhurst Nursing Center, said, "I can't stress to you enough how important the Family Council is to life at Greenhurst."

A successful family council must have a good leader who is familiar with the nursing home operations, is knowledgeable about group dynamics and has a working relationship with the administration and staff. Our family council president, Susie Hood, not only meets these requirements, but also keeps every council member informed about new nursing home policies, offers updates about life at Greenhurst and organizes and leads each family council meeting. Family Council members are free to voice concerns to her, which she delivers to the administration. This keeps the family anonymous and blocks any possible repercussions. Hood enables the administration, staff, residents and families to successfully address problems because she encourages a comfortable and open dialogue. I have observed everyone working together

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er to sort out what suggestions are reasonable what has occurred in the past and what changes may be possible.

The Family Council is involved with each new admission to Greenhurst, staff and resident birthdays and in reporting changes in health status of its residents. Some of the Family Council members are at Greenhurst daily and can help assess those whose family may not be able to visit as often,

Unfortunately, I cannot see my own son as often as I would like because we live 130 miles away. I have been assured that someone, in addition to the staff, will interact with our son on a frequent basis, and will communicate with the Family Council president if there is a concern. This is a tremendous safety net.

The Greenhurst Family Council officially meets once a month, and besides attending most meetings, I have also been involved with at least four family council projects in less than a year.

In October, the family council organized a large yard sale. With the proceeds from the yard sale (which totaled almost \$1,000), council members were given money to buy a Christmas gift for each resident

(as per suggestions from the staff). During our December meeting, we brought our wrapped gifts for the residents, a \$5 gift to be exchanged within the council and feasted on everyone's favorite Christmas recipe.

Later in the month, the Council combined forces and fed each shift a home-cooked meal. In March, the council held their annual bake sale in the conference room at the nursing home.

It was a success as a moneymaker but also provided enjoyable group time for each council member to once again, touch base with one another.

In May, each member of the Council brought two or three casseroles or desserts to feed the nurses, LPNs, and CNAs. We should have compiled a recipe book as every dish was delicious. While the staff enjoyed the food we had brought and served to them, many of the Family Council members gathered together in the lobby to visit with each other and to renew our common bond. This allowed me to once again feel as if I was part of something of great significance and something that continues to reassure and grant me the strength to continue on the path our family had chosen for our son.

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