



The Effect of a “Good” Environment



Richard G. Stefanacci, DO, MGH, MBA, AGSF, CMD

Dr. Stefanacci continues to build on his work as the 2003-2004 Health Policy Scholar at the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), where he helped develop and implement the Medicare Part D Pharmacy Benefit. He is currently creating a LTC Management Degree Program for undergraduate and graduate students in the Geriatric Health Program, Center for Medicare Medication Management (cm3), Mayes College, University of the Sciences in Philadelphia (USP).

As a geriatrician, Dr. Stefanacci has worked in LTC for decades as medical director for several nursing facilities and continuing care retirement communities. He has also served as a medical director for primary care private practices, full-risk provider groups, Medicare + Choice HMO (M+C) programs, and PACE (Program for All-inclusive Care for the Elderly) program in Philadelphia. Dr. Stefanacci provides direct patient care for the St. Agnes LIFE program and works with Newcourtland on innovative LTC services such as electronic dispensing and prescribing systems for the company's facilities. He also serves as executive director of HepTREC, the Delaware Valley Hepatitis Treatment, Research and Education Center (HepTREC).

A graduate of A.T. Still University, Dr. Stefanacci completed his clinical training at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey in Internal Medicine and earned a fellowship in Geriatrics at the same institution.

Dr. Stefanacci participates actively in the American Medical Directors Association (AMDA), Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy, American Society of Consultant Pharmacist (ASCP), and the American Geriatrics Society (AGS). He is a fellow in both the College of Physicians of Philadelphia and AGS and an honorary lifetime member of ASCP. He is editor-in-chief of the *Assisted Living Consult* and *Medicare Patient Management* and serves on the editorial boards of *Consultant Pharmacist*, *American Psychiatry News*, *LTC Interface*, *Managed Care*, and *Jefferson's Health Policy Newsletter*.

Dr. Stefanacci's proudest accomplishment is as founder and member of the board of directors of www.Go4TheGoal.org.

Although all of our issues of *AJC* deal with tools to provide assistance in living for older adults, this issue has the environment as its central focus. I have been thinking about what I would write in this opening for some time, and finally on my flight back from Japan it hit me. I'm just completing a family holiday in Japan. Many months ago I felt the need to be more adventurous. Call it a midlife moment, call it a desire to expose my children to more, call it what you will...the result was a trip to Japan.

Despite fairly extensive reading on Japan and its culture, there were still many unexpected and pleasant surprises. For one, despite speaking very little English, the Japanese were by far the most polite people one could meet. At every turn they would go out of their way to be helpful. This was not just because we were an unusual site in Japan; I witnessed the same when Japanese dealt with Japanese whether at a convenience store or during a business discussion. The take-home message from this is that attitude matters a great deal and can, in fact, cover for other deficiencies.

When hiring staff, it is far more important to hire the correct attitude and train for the needed skill set. Attitude can go a great distance in providing assistance in living. Of course, it is not just attitude that makes the Japanese economy number 2 in the world. Its economy is led by a society that can usher 12M people into and out of its largest city with the precision of a Swiss watch. Beyond attitude, it's the environment and systems that produce such

quality results—systems that include a subway system that works with fantastic efficiency and effectiveness.

A System for Senior Health

In fact, in this issue we discuss a system developed to promote senior health—the American System for Advancing Senior Health (ASASH™; see page 18). ASASH is a system that brings together government, employers, managed care organizations, providers, advocates, manufacturers, and seniors to provide a *single source* for senior patients and clinicians to access care support. Read more about this organization and how you can support your residents' quests for better health.

Environment and Systems Coming Together

While in Japan my family and I witnessed another example of environment and system coming together to promote cleanliness of Japanese streets. This despite the fact that there are no trash cans to be found. This seems at first to be inconsistent. How can a city of 12M be immaculate, yet there not be any trash cans? The answer is environment that has forced a certain positive attitude.

The Japanese do not believe in multitasking. There is no walking while eating. Instead, meals from fast food to vending machines are consumed where purchased and discarded. As a result, there is no need to have trash cans on the street because there is no trash anywhere except where it should be. A place for everything and everything in its place leads to total order. This same system can be

applied to assisted living (AL) programs and facilities, provided that the attitudes agree to conform to what is needed.

The take-home message is stop multitasking. The instilling of an attitude in a facility comes from the top. Having a staff meeting while you are busy Blackberrying or reviewing forms gives staff the impression that it is okay to focus one's attention away from the matter at hand to other things. Instead, give that one single task your undivided attention.

A Focus on the Little Things

It truly is all about these little things that can make a great deal of difference. It's these little things that when focused on can dramatically improve quality. An example of the importances of focusing on the little things was illustrated in Malcolm Galdwell's book *The Tipping Point*. In it Galdwell explains that the reason for improvement in the New York City crime rates was that there was a focus on the "little things." By focusing on cleaning the streets and repairing buildings, a sense of law and order was restored; as a result, crime rates fell. So too in building an AL program or facility, the little things cannot be underestimated in their importance—such things as a common stationery, frequent staff gatherings, and even a logoed uniform can provide a sense of common purpose to the organization.

Fun Learning

A starting point for a focus on these little things can be in the regular staff meetings. Besides working on attitude at these meetings, you can use these meetings to improve systems. So much of what happens to all of us, but especially older adults, can be avoided if only steps are taken earlier to prevent these preventable events from occurring in the first place.

A simple way to apply much of what we are discussing is a program called the PREvent Exercise. This is a regularly scheduled meeting with key staff that reviews cases from within the facility or program or straight from the front pages of the newspaper. The staff reviews a single case to identify what could have been done to prevent these events from occurring within the facility or program. The Proactive Review Exercise, which is where the PRE comes from, is a way to engage the interdisciplinary staff in an interactive fun manner to improve outcomes.

Other work that can be accomplished during these team meetings includes staff education. This must be done in an entertaining environment so that staff remain engaged and retain the message. Senioropoly (see the March/April issue of *ALC*, page 32, www.assistedlivingconsult.com/issues/04-02/alc34-Team-Education-326.pdf), a take-off on monopoly, is an example of one way to accomplish staff education in a fun and engaging manner.

Fun learning can also occur with residents. The Wii game system (see *ALC* January/February, page 17, www.assistedlivingconsult.com/issues/04-01/alc12-Use%20It-121.pdf) provides a number of opportunities for not only fun engagement, but mind and body exercise. A new Wii component that has just become available in the US is WiiFit, a balance board peripheral that connects to the Wii system. Once connected, the system walks a participant through different exercises.

Regulating Quality

All of the quality initiatives that I have discussed up to this point are generated from within. In my opinion, quality initiatives must start from this point. However, there are many legislators who disagree. Pennsylvania for exam-

ple is busy attempting to legislate quality. In our last issue of *ALC* (page 35 March/April issue, www.assistedlivingconsult.com/issues/04-02/alc34-Legal-326a.pdf), Matt Corso and Brett Littman discussed legislation in Pennsylvania to regulate AL facilities. It is increasingly likely that despite the AL industry's reluctance to be regulated like skilled nursing facilities, the industry's lack of focus on quality, especially as it relates to health care, will result in regulation being forced on it.

This is certainly a shame because if history is any message of what happens with regulations in health care, we know that regulations only serve to provide a minimum for quality. This minimum all too often is all that facilities achieve. Regulations must not stand in the way of providing high-quality results. High-quality results can only be achieved when environment and systems are in place and designed to realize such goals. In this issue, we cover environment and systems, including a round table on design function (see page 37), the use of pill cards (page 14), and a new series on universal design (page 25). While it may be impossible to include all these environmental designs and systems or push one's facility or program to the limits of the Japanese, clearly, steps aimed at improving a facility's environment and systems can start simply. Simple beginnings can go a long way toward improving quality for our older adults while we assist them with living.

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Richard G. Stefanacci, DO, MGH,
MBA, AGSF, CMD
Editor-in-Chief
215-596-7466
rstefanacci@assistedlivingconsult.com