

PLAYSTATION®, INTERNET, AND RAP

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The times are a-changing! PlayStation®, Internet, and rap are three words that 25 years ago did not mean anything in nursing homes. The whole structure of the nursing home system is changing before our eyes with diagnoses such as MS (multiple sclerosis), muscular dystrophy, Parkinson's disease, CVA (stroke), TBI (traumatic brain injury), and morbid obesity becoming more prevalent and the average age of the nursing home resident rapidly dropping. Years ago, the average age in a nursing home was that of an octogenarian; today, the average age is more of the baby boomers and less.

As the average age drops, several different issues arise from an activity standpoint. For instance, what type of music makes the residents happy? Do they like Bing Crosby or Crosby, Stills, and Nash or Eminem? As health care professionals, we have an obligation to our residents to give them a quality of life that we were once giving residents who were 90 years old. The only problem is resident X is 40-years-old and wants to hook up to the Internet and watch his favorite baseball team while his cancer slowly deteriorates his body. We need to assess what makes his quality of life better. For years, some segments in the health field have changed their focus to their age groups social needs (i.e., children's hospitals have clowns, video games, and fun centers). Well, I have news for you - the times are a-changing, and we need to get with the program.

My first encounter that enlightened me to this was working as an Activity Director in a nursing home in Arizona in a corporation that consisted of 12 nursing homes. I had a large population of octogenarian residents, but we started getting younger admissions with kidney disease, MS, and CVA. Before I knew it, I was surrounded by residents in their late 30s and early 40s. When I was doing activity assessments, the most popular answers to favorite singer was Pink Floyd and favorite activities were watching adult movies and drinking beer. I had to offer programs specifically for younger residents so they could be themselves without offending the other residents. We started a men's club / poker night where the men could curse, drink non-alcoholic beer, tell dirty jokes, and share stories that made them feel at home. It was an eye-opening experience to see how happy these residents became when they were allowed to be themselves, feeling like they were home again and not in a nursing home. It was then I realized that the words "age-appropriate" no longer had a place in nursing homes, and the words themselves were as antiquated as my great grandfather's fedora hat.

During my tenure with this corporation, I ran into a nurse consultant who made the mistake of telling the residents that the music that was on the radio was not appropriate and turned it off. Before you knew it, the residents called an emergency resident council meeting to discuss the violation of their rights. They were right. Who was she to decide what they should listen to? (The music was the Rolling Stones who have been playing music for over 40 years.) The residents made their point that day, and hopefully, I have done the same. Just think if today you were put into a nursing facility. If I moved to a nursing home today, I would need the ability to follow the New York Yankees, be on the Internet, and play an Xbox 360 to keep me going. What would you need to keep your sanity? The times are a-changing! ☹