

## HIGHEST PRACTICABLE LEVEL OF WELL-BEING

*Carmen Bowman, ACC*

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Have you ever heard of “highest practicable level of well-being”? Have you ever wondered what in the world it means? The term “highest practicable” comes from the OBRA Long Term Care Regulations. The regulations state that a facility must assist a resident to attain or maintain his/her highest practicable level of well-being.

The F Tag 279 Comprehensive Care Plans often get missed. Most people only read the first paragraph which states that the facility must develop a comprehensive care plan based on the comprehensive assessment. Not many people go on to read the second paragraph which covers how the facility is required to describe the services that are to be furnished to attain or maintain the resident’s highest practicable physical, mental, and psychosocial well-being.

As an Activity or Recreation Professional, do you assess and care plan for your residents’ **highest level of well-being** regarding activities? If you don’t, you are not alone. However, you should. It’s fun and should be at the heart of what we do.

To determine a resident’s highest practicable level, you might try the following:

**1. Interview the Resident.** Ask the resident detailed questions regarding his activity interests, capabilities, and desires to pursue those interests. What would the person do if he could do whatever he wanted? Could this activity conceivably be provided? In an adapted fashion? Brainstorm during your interview. Ask, “Would you try...?” or “Would you enjoy...?”

I met Lucky during the initial tour of a survey. I asked him to tell me about the activities at the facility. Lucky asked, “What activities?” I said I knew the facility offered activities such as current events, exercise, and bingo. Lucky replied, “If you call those activities.” Hmmm, I thought. I asked, “Okay, Lucky, if you could do anything, I don’t care what it is, what would it be?” He simply said, “I’m an electrician.” I asked him, “So, if we got you hooked up with the maintenance department, would you work on broken televisions and radios?” “Yes, I would,” he answered. In about four sentences, I was able to ascertain what Lucky’s highest practicable level of well-being was regarding activities.

**2. Observe the Resident.** Try to evaluate a resident’s highest level of functioning by observing him. Ask or prompt a resident to show you something or try something.

A resident named Paul illustrates this point. Paul’s care plan stated that he had an interest in music, played the guitar, and that a goal was to have a Music Therapist visit him every week. Elsewhere in the chart (not in the activities section), it stated that he was once a concert pianist. (A nurse verified this information.) When I asked Paul if he played the piano, he pointed to the facility piano and stated, “That piano?” The piano was old and had a broken leg and was probably not very appealing. After building rapport with Paul, I asked him if he would be interested in playing the piano for me. The last night of the survey, Paul offered to play for me during supper. I was stunned by the offer, and tears welled up in my eyes. Paul was indeed a concert pianist. For one moment in time, not

only was his highest practicable level of functioning and well-being met, but the quality of life for all the residents was affected positively. Since it was suppertime, all the residents got to listen to Paul's beautiful piano playing. They smiled, clapped, and whistled. It would have been so simple to work with Paul to maintain his highest practicable level of well-being. Perhaps he could have played daily, which would have contributed to his fellow residents' quality of life, as well as boosting Paul's self-esteem!

**3. Interview the Family.** Ask the resident's family and friends what he did with his time that was *meaningful*. Since it is our job to adapt activities, it doesn't matter if the resident can or cannot perform the activity now.

**4. Interview Staff.** Ask other staff members about the resident's capabilities. What do they see as the resident's highest practicable level of functioning/independence/well-being? Because different people may see something else at varying times of the day, ask staff from each shift the same question.

Once you've decided (as a team) what you believe the resident's "highest practicable" to be, design a **care plan** that reflects the services you are going to provide to help the resident attain that level. Include the resident's specific personal **goals** and indicate the appropriate **approaches** for staff to take to help the resident reach his goal.

For example, let's say a resident named Elsie lives on a secured unit for persons with dementia. Every day, I watch her dust with her bare hands. It would be more meaningful to provide her with a dust cloth! I also notice that a housekeeper comes to the unit every day at the same time. I could ask the housekeeper to commit to cleaning with Elsie for 15 minutes each day. This activity would help Elsie reach her highest practicable level of well-being, provide needed supervision, and boost Elsie's self-esteem.

The **care plan** for this activity might look something like this:

- Interest in cleaning and dusting is evidenced by the resident's daily cleaning and dusting behavior.

- **Goal:** For resident to clean daily under housekeeper's supervision for 15 minutes.

- **Approaches:**

- 1) Ask resident (if she is able to communicate sufficiently) if she is interested in this volunteer position.

- 2) Inform the resident's family of new activity intervention and rationale.

- 3) Ask a legal authority for permission for the resident to function as a volunteer. Explain the inter-vention's therapeutic value. (Your facility or state may have a host of requirements for such an intervention such as physician orders. Be sure to check.)

- 4) Provide a name tag for Elsie identifying her as Volunteer Housekeeping Staff. Ask staff to praise and thank her for her efforts.

Did you notice I did not identify this activity intervention as a "problem"? If you refer to F Tag 248, you will agree that we are not in the business of "problems," but rather

“interests.” Activities are interest-based, not problem-based. Keep this in mind as you help your residents reach their “highest practicable.”

*Carmen has been a Health Compliance Surveyor with the Health Facilities Division of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment for 7 years surveying nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and adult day programs. She also serves as the in-house activities specialist.*

*Carmen is a former Health Insurance Specialist with HCFA, now CMS (Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services). She continues to teach the Basic Surveyor Training Course with CMS and is currently on the CMS Activities Severity Panel workgroup. ☺*