

Questions and Answers about Culture Change

What is culture change?

Culture change in long term care is an ongoing transformation based on person-directed values that restores control to elders and those who work closest with them. This transformation includes changing core values, choices about the organization of time and space, relationships, language, rules, objects used in every day life, rituals, contact with nature, and resource allocation.

What does a transformation based on person-directed values look like?

The type of environment we are striving to create is dramatically different from the living, working, and care-giving environments found in most health care organizations. Providers that have made substantial progress in culture change have clients (be they elders or individuals living with disabilities) who truly direct their own care and make their own choices about how they spend their time. The workers in these organizations are highly involved in decisions that are relevant to their jobs and the people they care for. The clients, their families, and the workers are a part of a thriving, interdependent community.

Is culture change just for nursing homes?

No. The values, principles, and practices are applicable to any situation where elders or individuals living with disabilities are engaged in care giving relationships. These individuals risk losing control over their lives to whatever part of the health care system they are involved in. In the case of nursing homes and other residential living environments the transformation turns institutions into real homes. There are examples of transforming organizations emerging in home and community based services as well. These progressive providers have found ways to invite clients and workers onto their board of directors, include direct care workers on the training team and have reorganized scheduling systems to ensure the clients can enter into consistent care-giving relationships with their support staff. In the hospital community, the Planetree model is inviting acute care providers to re-invent the hospital experience into one that is genuinely supportive and healing.

Can you give an example of a change in practice based on person-directed values?

Practices that support person-directed values impact virtually every operation in an organization. Take for example, bathing. In a traditional nursing home, baths and showers are offered two times per week; a resident just moving in is likely to inherit the same bath schedule as the elder living in the bed before her. If Mrs. Jones had a bath on Tuesdays and Fridays at 7 PM, then so will Mrs. Smith when she moves into Mrs. Jones' former room. This is clearly a bathing process that is driven by the institution's schedule/routine. With person-directed practices, the staff would get to know Mrs. Smith and her family, learn how and when she preferred to bathe before coming to the nursing home, and ensure that this same life-long habit becomes a part of her care plan in her new home.

To make this one change effectively, many systems in the home need to change. Policies and procedures have to be re-written, the care planning process improved, the facility's long standing shift routines abandoned, and nursing assistants must be empowered to listen and respond to the resident's needs. Nurses need to be educated on new bathing techniques and person directed thinking so they can support the nursing assistants in their changed roles. Even the way staff performance is evaluated and new staff are oriented must change to reflect new values and practices.

What kind of outcomes are organizations that engage in culture change experiencing?

The Pioneer Network has collected some research and self reported data from organizations that are substantially far along in their culture change efforts. In addition to the information collected that demonstrates the dramatic positive outcomes culture change causes, members of the Pioneer Network have

personally visited these homes to verify the data is in fact reflected in the daily experiences of workers and residents. Transforming organizations report the following outcomes:

- Employee turnover between 10 and 30% with some nursing homes reporting waiting lists for workers who wish to be hired
- Elimination of temporary agency staffing and mandatory overtime
- Reduction in worker's compensation costs
- Significant improvements in employee satisfaction, resident satisfaction, and family satisfaction
- High levels of involvement in organizational activities by residents, staff and families
- Reduction in depression and use of medications to treat depression and behavioral problems
- Reduction in unanticipated weight loss
- Elimination of physical and chemical restraints
- Reduction in mortality
- Increased involvement with the outside community including children, students, clubs and associations, religious organizations and town government



Source: The Pioneer Network, 2005.