

Family Council

*That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing,
being fruitful in every good work,
and increasing in the knowledge of God. Col. 1:10*

Once Mother was settled into her new room at the end of the hall, Doris King, daughter of the lady who shared the room with Mother before the move. We discussed forming a family council at the nursing home. We hoped to help open pathways of communication between residents, their families and staff. We spent several months looking at different web sites and received encouragement from other family members.

During the time when both Doris and I were at the nursing home we would talk about different sites on the web and/or mailings we had received: i.e., care in nursing home, resident's rights, family council, etc. Mother would look at me as if to say, "What are you doing NOW?", but she was delighted that I was taking such an interest not only in her welfare but others, too. We hoped that such a council would prove an effective tool to improve the quality of life for residents, to improve working conditions for staff, and involve family members in the care of their loved one in a meaningful way.

We wanted to be sure everything was done right, and that also meant talking with the administration about our plans. Doris and I met with the administrator, who was skeptical at first because a family council had been tried in the past, turning out to be only a "gripe" session. We assured him that would not always happen. People might gripe at the beginning due to the fact this would be their first interaction with a number of people, but it could be more than one person with the same problem. However, we made it perfectly clear that the family council was not being established for people to vent their frustrations. Our purpose states: *"Our group has a primary goal of protecting and improving the quality of life for our family members. We know it is difficult to have a loved one move into a nursing facility and the feelings of guilt, isolation, bewilderment and loss can be overwhelming. We have all shared this same experience and can provide a special support to one another."* The Council motto states: *"We must take small steps to achieve our goal. Instead of wanting 100% change now, we must make a hundred 1% changes over time."* We are the first to say the Family & Friends Council has the strong backing of the administrator and staff.

We thought everything was ready for an organizational meeting to be Monday, November 6, 2000, at 6:00 P.M. Not knowing that by November 6th I would not have a family member in the nursing home, but I knew that Mother would want me to continue with what I had helped start.

Our first big undertaking was to put together a checklist that family members could use

when they visited different nursing homes. Members of the Family & Friends Council know it is intimidating for family members who usually have an extremely limited time frame (sometimes only one or two days) to reach a decision that will have an immense impact on the entire family. The pressure to find THE BEST place to meet the particular needs of your loved one adds an enormous amount of stress to an already off-the-scale stressful situation.

A checklist was developed (see Tool 2), which committee members would have liked when they were looking for a special place for their loved one. It is our hope that this checklist will be of assistance to others in determining the best facility to meet the particular needs of one's family member.

At the organizational meeting on November 5, 2000, temporary officers were elected with Doris King as president, Daddy as treasurer and myself as vice-president. The members then approved each meeting would begin with a program which included family members, guests, the nursing home administrator, staff, guest speaker, and the local ombudsman. A question and answer session followed so the administrator and/or staff could answer any concern(s) a family member might have or bring the group up-to-date. After the program and q&a, the staff and guest speaker were thanked and excused, the council then holds a private session in which the administration may attend at the invitation of the council. The closed meeting convenes, and any questions and/or concerns are discussed. Decisions are made whether they need to be passed to the proper administration person. We are pleased that the local ombudsman attends each meeting.

November 12, 2001, the "Family & Friends Council" at the nursing home celebrated its first anniversary and is still going strong. The Council has been able to accomplish a number of things; i.e., employee appreciation award to nursing home individual or department; bulletin board prominently placed; welcome letter with checklist placed in front foyer of the nursing home; addition of white board at each wing nurses station providing names of shift RN and LPN supervisor and CNAs. Upon admission to the nursing home, the family member is given a packet of pertinent information about the home along with a welcome letter from the Family & Friends Council. Our newsletter is sent with the nursing home monthly statements. All of the preceding came as a result of positive talks with the administrator.

There is a Balm in Gilead

*There is a Balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole,
There is a Balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.
Sometimes I feel discouraged, And think my work's in vain,
But then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again.*