

The Little Things that Matter

Introduction

Before entering Alma Via of San Francisco for the first time, I initially believed that hospitality is not just a service but more. However, the “more” was still considered unknown; it was still vague for me until I set foot into one of Transforming Age’s facilities. I immediately witnessed a deep bond between the residents and staff, who valued each other like family. It felt like walking into a family reunion where the staff knew the residents’ needs without asking. The bright smiles lit up the dining room, making the atmosphere warm and welcoming. In that moment, I had my ‘aha’ moment: I realized that the “more” I had been searching for is the emotional support, dignity, and genuine human connection displayed. In eldercare, both hospitality and culinary are not only amenities but also core factors in wellness.

Hospitality

My understanding of hospitality began in my family’s nail salon, where I spent most of my childhood. I watched my mom build long-lasting relationships with her clients through small but meaningful gestures such as remembering their preferred colors, listening to their stories about their loved ones, and offering comfort during stressful days. All of these actions were reciprocated in different ways, building an emotional human connection that is scarce nowadays. It created a safe space where people from both sides felt seen and valued. Therefore, when I entered AVSF, I recognized those same principles but even more profound.

Personal Experience

During one of my shifts, I had a conversation with a resident that deeply touched me. They shared that they were struggling with their inheritance and family issues, leading them to feel uncertain about their housing situation and future. Nevertheless, they always had a positive outlook and lent a hand wherever. This really resonated with me in a parallel way, where I acknowledge I just have to keep going and be optimistic without knowing what the future holds.

In the dining room, a resident remembered my name in Vietnamese and was so excited about it. Every time she saw me, she called my name out loud. Another time, when another resident asked, “What’s your name again?” every day for weeks, they recently remembered and

confirmed my name, “Tram, right?” These are the moments that make me feel seen and cared for. In eldercare, hospitality exists as a necessary foundation that supports emotional stability, reduces anxiety, and highlights a sense of belonging for residents who may be navigating memory loss, loneliness, or major life transitions.

Culinary

Culinary care plays an essential role in the resident’s daily life, physically and emotionally. I got to observe how their favorite meals can actively create a happy environment. This makes me recall the time when a resident feared that others would hear it and whispered in my ear that she wanted three cookies to share in the gathering room after her meal. When I handed her the cookies, she was so pleased; she hugged and kissed me immediately. Behind the scenes, the teamwork and bonding do not end either, working to meet dietary needs, texture modifications, and cultural preferences. During my food preparation rotation, I learned about three texture modifications: puree, mechanical, and regular. One of the cooks taught me how to prepare pureed food, focusing on the three essential components of a meal: starch, protein, and vegetables. These meals are then taken to Oasis, Garden, and Brookhaven in the memory care facility.

Together, culinary and hospitality create holistic care towards physical, emotional, and social wellness. I am honored to be able to work and learn with a team that directly influences the residents’ health, including joy, independence, and a sense of identity.

Recommendations

After conversing with Mr.Perez, the thing that really impacted me was when we talked about how an individual would feel if they were to eat at the same restaurant everyday, three times a day. I enjoyed that AVSF has buffets and different types of ways to display their cooking for the residents to observe, however, these residents only have the dining room. Therefore, to make it more interesting and enjoyable, I would recommend having some kind of theme change in the dining hall, server’s uniform or just a small change in the way we place the napkins and utensils. An idea that struck me was that the dining team could have a country theme every week where they could explore the many distinct cuisines.

Another thing I would recommend and this might be because I am a nursing student is that I would have enjoyed more time getting to know the residents on a higher level. Maybe with that, the residents and staff understand their dietary needs better.

As for the internship, I would recommend more rotations, even if there are only four rotations, possibly the intern can work with a different person every week. This would allow them to get to know every team member individually and switch rotations without it feeling overwhelmed by the different roles.

Conclusion

As a Gen Z entering the healthcare field, I found myself inspired by this work. Ending this internship, I take away with me a new understanding: these departments are not background operations but essential pillars of elderly care. My experience at AVSF has strengthened my confidence and clarified what kind of nurse I want to become, such as someone who sees the whole person, not just their medical needs. This recognition of the Transforming Age's mission—to provide dignity-centered, human-focused care—has shaped my perspective and will continue to guide me in nursing, reminding me that care doesn't just exist in clinicals but everywhere.