

Title: Adult Day Care Centers: an Underutilized Resource

Description:

During my rotation in LaGrange, there was a mandatory Geriatric lecture each Friday for the medical students and the resident on Geriatric service. These lectures were particularly engaging because instead of sitting through a power point presentation for two hours each week, we went on fieldtrips to nursing homes, adult day care facilities, and senior centers in LaGrange in order to learn about the different community resources available to the aging population and their families. During our field trip to the West Suburban Senior Services OARS Adult Day Care Center, I learned that despite the growing number of individuals with dementia within Suburban Cook County, the center was significantly under-enrolled. I was not aware that such facilities existed and was encouraged to hear that this kind of resource was available at a manageable cost (a sliding scale based on household income) to people with dementia and their care takers. For my project I decided to help increase awareness within the community and among health care professionals by doing the following:

- Coordinate a relationship between the Midwestern University work-study program and the OARS Adult Day Care Center
- Provide the OARS Center's information pamphlets to each of the health care professionals (approximately 70) attending the Midwestern University Dementia Care Conference on August 22, 2006.
- Provide updated OARS Center information pamphlets to the LaGrange Senior Center
- Communicate with the Suburban Area Agency on Aging for Suburban Cook County to ensure that the West Suburban Senior Services webpage was a link on the Suburban Area Agency on Aging's Community Resources page. This page is currently under construction, but I was assured that the West Suburban Senior Services webpage was and will continue to be a regular link on their site since they serve as a partner agency.

Short-Term Goal: To increase the awareness among current health professionals and within the community about the aforementioned OARS Adult Day Care Center.

Long-Term Goal: To establish a functional relationship between the Midwestern University's work-study program and the OARS Adult Day Care Center in order to both increase awareness among future health professionals and to provide assistance to the OARS Center as needed.

Rationale: It is imperative that health care professionals are aware of the community resources that are available to their patients so that they can better address their patients' needs. On a state and national level, it is clear that the aging population is growing and with it the number of individuals with dementia is steadily increasing. This project addresses the need to increase awareness and communication between preexisting organizations in order to facilitate appropriate utilization.

The goals of Healthy People 2010 emphasize both improving the quality of life for a particular population in addition to eliminating health disparities between various patient populations/communities. The focus of my project was to increase awareness within the community that adult day care centers for individuals with dementia are available to

those in need. The Health People 2010 initiative includes a focus area dealing with educational and community-based programs and this project deals with not only educating health professionals within the community, but linking community programs and resources to one another in order to increase community awareness.¹

Approximately 14.4% of Suburban Cook County is comprised of individuals over the age of 65.² Based on national statistics, about one in ten individuals over the age of 65 and almost 50% of individuals over age 85 are affected by dementia.³ Clearly this is a significant portion of the community on a local and national level. Having access to a resource such as an adult day care facility gives family members and/or caregivers an option for assistance when needed.

Method:

The method I used as stated above in the description of the project emphasized communication among preexisting organizations. It is not always necessary to start something new within a community when resources already exist. My goal was to coordinate some of the existing organizations to enhance awareness and ultimately increase the number of individuals taking advantage of the OARS Adult Day Care Center.

Community Resources:

One of the focus areas of my project was to facilitate communication between preexisting community resources. I believe this is a fundamental aspect of increasing both awareness and access to care within the community.

Culture:

My project focuses on three cultures in their own right: the aging population – specifically those with dementia, who make up a subculture within the senior community; those who provide care to the aforementioned demented individuals; and health care professionals, who comprise a culture all to themselves. The project is aimed at working with each of these cultures in order to provide information and resources to the extent that is needed and with the resources and time available.

Results:

In order to gauge the impact of my project, it would be necessary to have on-going follow-up with the OARS Adult Day Care Center, Midwestern University's work-study program, and the LaGrange Senior Center to determine whether the lines of communication were still open and active and to detect whether enrollment at the OARS Center was increasing over time. This follow-up exceeds the time allotted for this rotation; however I will have some continued communication with Pat VanRiper from the financial aid department at Midwestern University. I was successful in communicating between the different organizations within the Suburban Cook County community (LaGrange Senior Center, Suburban Area on Aging) so that they would have the most recent information on the OARS Adult Day Care Center. This will enable these organizations to provide the most current information to community members seeking such resources.

Discussion:

One of the challenges I encountered while working on this project was due to the fact that the administration changed at the OARS Adult Day Care Center while I was working on setting-up the work-study program with Northwestern University. Since they have a new program director the final paperwork was delayed until just yesterday, but I was informed that it has all been processed/approved and an announcement will be going out to students about this new opportunity very soon. Each of the groups that I contacted was very supportive of my project and appreciated the initiative I was taking to coordinate each of the organizations. This project could be further developed by getting different student groups at Northwestern University involved in volunteering at the OARS Center in addition to having a representative come to Northwestern University in order to do a presentation on how the center works, who they serve, what they offer the community, etc. This would further enhance the awareness among future health professionals. In addition, facilitating continued communication between the LaGrange Senior Center and the OARS Center so that the most up-to-date information about this community resource could be available to seniors and their families. This project could also be expanded to include other geriatric and dementia-focused community resources to further increase awareness about existing programs in the community.

The project was a great experience for me because I had an opportunity to learn about a community resource that I was not familiar with before. I also enjoyed working with the different organizations and learned a great deal about how to link these groups together so that they could be even more effective in reaching those in need (i.e. individuals with dementia and their primary care givers).

The best way to monitor the efficacy of this project would be to observe the enrollment at the OARS Center over a period of several weeks to months. In addition, the number of students from Northwestern University who choose to participate in the work-study program could be noted over the next year in order to determine whether or not a significant number of students were getting exposure to this type of community resource. As for determining whether the pamphlets supplied at the Dementia Care conference at Northwestern University aided in increasing awareness among those present, a post-conference survey or questionnaire could be distributed to see whether or not those information pamphlets were beneficial.

Resources:

1. Cook County Public Health Population Statistics:
<http://www.cookcountypublichealth.org/statistics/Population/PDFs/Population%20by%20Age%20and%20Sex,%202000%20Census.pdf>
2. Suburban Area Agency on Aging: Fact Sheet on Caregiving in Suburban Cook County: www.s3a.com/research.htm
3. Dementia: <http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/full/292/12/1514>