

Board & Care Quality

F O R U M

Published by Reisacher Petro and Associates

Vol. 11

No. 4

July/August 2008

Planetree: Relationship-Centered Caring Environments

Planetree is a patient-centered model of care that was originally developed for hospitals and healthcare centers. It was founded by Angelica Thierot in 1978 in response to extremely unpleasant hospital experiences she had endured. Officially established as a non-profit organization with an advisory board in 1985, Planetree is named for the sycamore tree in Greece under which Hippocrates sat when he taught medicine to his students.

In this interview, Heidi Gil, Director of Continuing Care for Planetree, discusses how, in a partnership with United Methodist Homes, the core components of the Planetree model have been adapted to apply to continuing care residential settings, such as board and care homes. Ms. Gil holds a bachelor's degree in health care administration from the University of Connecticut. She is a licensed nursing home administrator and has over 17 years of experience in long term care, assisted living, independent living, and skilled nursing care environments. Ms. Gil served as the Executive Director of Wesley Village while United Methodist Homes was developing and implementing Planetree Continuing Care.

What did Angelica Thierot experience when she was in the hospital and what did she feel could or should be different for patients in healthcare settings?

“Angie really believes that she had the best of technological care while in the hospital. What she yearned for was *humanistic* care and an environment where care would be personalized and where caregivers try to de-mystify the hospital experience. She knew that she had a life-threatening virus, but she did not receive information or education on what was happening. She did not feel like an individual. They often talked

over her and said things like, ‘We think we’re going to lose her.’ It was a very scary, intimidating experience.

“When Angie was able to reflect on how she had healed, she remembered the caregivers who *had* personalized her care and who had communicated with her about what was going on. That was the foundation of her healing. From that, she knew that--although she survived the experience because of technology--it was human touch and human interaction that brought her true healing. She believed that if she could not start transforming healthcare in this country, she would have to go back to her previous home--Argentina--where, in her experience, the care was at least humanistic.

“Angie initially wanted to start out by changing the entire healthcare environment. She wanted to shake up the whole paradigm, or model, and change it completely. Her goal was to take the best of spas, the best of hotels, and the best of hospitals, and truly create a healing environment where just *being there* would feel healing. Years ago, those goals seemed unrealistic. But now, we are at a tipping point. People want and expect good medical care, and they also want a good patient experience. So, Angie opened the minds and hearts of people to rethink what was necessary to deliver good patient experience and medical outcomes.

“At the same time, the Planetree model empowers patients to have a voice. From her experiences, Angie concluded that patients deserve to be empowered through information and education. The health resource library was a pivotal part of Planetree’s beginnings at a San Francisco hospital. It further educated and empowered patients about their illness so they could begin to heal in new ways.”

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