Michigan Accord Presentations Promote Changes in Approaches to Long Term Care

This article reports on a conference held in Bath, Michigan, on January 22, 2006.

“What are old people for?” This provocative question was asked by Dr. Bill Thomas, developer of the Eden Alternative ™, as he addressed the participants at the 2006 Michigan Accord, Health Care in the 21st Century: Rediscovering the Art of Caring on January 11, 2006. The conference was presented by BEAM*, a nationally recognized leader in culture change. Over 400 participants from a wide variety of health care backgrounds attended the conference, which was dedicated to supporting and promoting person-centered approaches and culture change in long term care settings in Michigan.

Dr. Thomas was one of a number of presenters who described how long term care is evolving from the traditional medical model, which he described as being based on decline and failure, to a very different paradigm in which elders are seen as valuable and capable of continuing to grow. He contrasted the more traditional approach with his Green House Project ™ which involves creating “an intentional community of a small group of unrelated people who come together to share the rhythm of daily life and to pursue some noble end.” In this vision, both elders and those who assist them benefit from knowing and growing with each other. Rather than a task-oriented approach, these caring communities are based on a reciprocal exchange between generations. Care assistants are responsible for helping the elders create well-being in the elders. The elders are responsible for helping the care assistants develop mastery.

The Circle of Champions: Establishing an Effective, Affordable Cultural Infrastructure to Renew Elder Care was the title of a plenary presentation given by Barry Barkan, also a nationally recognized proponent of culture change. Barkan and his wife, Debby, have been involved in changing the long term care system since the 1970s when they introduced the Regenerative Community model at the Home for Jewish Parents in Oakland, CA, and later created the Live Oak Living Center in nearby El Sobrante and the Live Oak Institute. He is also a founder of the Pioneer Network, a coalition dedicated to changing nursing home culture and aging in America.

Barkan began by defining culture as “a binding force that holds people or an organization together”. He discussed how a healthy culture contains shared values and beliefs, rituals that celebrate successes and mark passages, and both individual and shared behavioral norms. Additionally, such a culture encompasses “heroes and champions” who exemplify the values and beliefs and story tellers who transmit the culture. The healthy culture includes group decision making and sharing of information. In the Circle of Champions approach, managers, staff and residents are responsible for promoting the elders, the values, the highest possible good, one’s own learning and growth, and the overall organization. Barkan also suggested that it is time to move away from the concept of culture change and toward a notion of culture building.
In addition to these national presenters, participants heard from individuals involved with changing the face of long term care in Michigan. Colleen Tallen, MD, Medical Director of Palliative Medicine at Saint Mary’s Health Center in Grand Rapids, addressed issues related to implementing person-centered care in health care systems. Laura Ferrara, Executive Director of BEAM, effectively presented the reasons why culture change makes sense from a business perspective. Finally, a panel of Michigan nursing home administrators described their experiences and challenges in implementing culture change in their facilities and the positive outcomes that have resulted.

In his opening remarks, Dr. Thomas referred to Michigan as a positive example of a state that is engaged in implementing culture change and person-centered approaches to care. As a result of the Michigan Medicaid Task Force and other driving forces, the face of long term care in Michigan is changing. Resources for learning more about culture change in general and specific changes in Michigan are listed below. Individuals interested in attending conferences addressing long term care in Michigan will find a number of conferences listed in the calendar section of this newsletter.

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* BEAM is a wholly-owned subsidiary of MPRO, Michigan’s Medicare Quality Improvement Organization (QIO)

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Selected Resources on Long Term and Culture Change

BEAM will be presenting a series of trainings called **Illuminations** that will provide an opportunity for health care providers in all long term care settings to discover information, knowledge and tools to use in their pursuit of culture change and person-centered care. Contact Karen Peters, BEAM Organizational Development Specialist, at kpeters@mibeam.org for more information. BEAM website: [http://www.mibeam.org](http://www.mibeam.org)

Consumer Direction in Aging Services website: [http://www.consumerdirection.org](http://www.consumerdirection.org)


Green House Project website: [http://thegreenhouseproject.org/index.htm](http://thegreenhouseproject.org/index.htm)

MI Medicaid Long Term Care Task Force website: [http://www.ihcs.msu.edu/LTC](http://www.ihcs.msu.edu/LTC)

Pioneer Network website: [http://www.pioneernetwork.net](http://www.pioneernetwork.net)

See the Calendar of Events in this issue of *Update* for a list of upcoming conferences and training programs addressing aging, mental health, and long term care.