



Growing Old in Paradise – The Eden Alternative™

Walk in the front door of Chase Memorial Nursing Home and your senses are greeted by a cornucopia of domestic delights – the smell of baking bread, the chatter of toddlers, a furry cat peeking through a jungle of plants, and staff that seem more like caring family than paid employees. You have just entered the model home for the Eden Alternative™, a revolutionary approach to nursing home care.

The brainchild of Dr. William Thomas, a Harvard trained medical doctor, the Eden Alternative strives to transform the sterile environment that breed loneliness, helplessness, and boredom into fertile gardens that nurture social and spiritual growth for nursing home residents and staff alike.

According to Dr. Thomas, the current medical model of nursing homes is focused on disability, disease, and decline. This negative perspective filters into the psyche of both the residents and employees --residents succumb to feelings of uselessness and staff turnover climbs steadily. The solution is to re-engage residents in the process of living and to empower employees to have more input and control over their daily work.

The Eden philosophy might be dismissed as fluff but for its tangible effects. Clinical trials demonstrate that Chase Memorial is spending significantly less on prescription drugs and each resident is taking less medication - particularly drugs that treat anxiety and depression. Furthermore, 25% fewer deaths were reported at Chase Memorial than a control facility. Thomas estimates that if all nursing homes in the United States were to accomplish only half of the reduction in costs that Chase Memorial has realized the national health care system could save \$1.25 billion in one year.

While the Eden Alternative's most tangible differences are the inclusion of plants, animals, and children, its broader, underlying philosophy affects the entire organizational environment. Thomas sets forth three precepts - Golden Rules - that characterize the Eden Alternative in practice:

- 1). Do unto your employees what you would have the employees do unto the residents.

- 2). Return decision making back to the elders and their families and caregivers. Doctors serve as the experts concerning a patient's physical health, but the residents, families and caregivers know the secrets to their social health.

- 3). Finally, there must be a basic commitment to the ongoing growth of each individual and the organization.

This innovative approach to care for the elderly is attracting an enthusiastic following; so far about 300 nursing homes in the United States have been “Edenized.”

In a recent interview Dr. Thomas compares the possibilities for long-term care innovation with ice cream: "When the baby boomers were kids there were three flavors of ice cream, and that was it. And when they got done with ice cream, there were a thousand flavors... And that's the way it should be."

To learn more about the Eden Alternative, find an Eden facility in your area, or how you can “Edenize” a nursing home near you, contact the Eden Alternative online at www.edenalt.com or by phone 607-674-5232.

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