



MEMO

Culture Change as a Cornerstone for Quality Improvement: An open letter to Missouri's long-term care leaders

You might remember a television commercial from several years ago in which an auto mechanic and a parts salesman stand in a garage discussing the relative costs of either changing your oil filter or rebuilding your engine. It was quite a success for the Fram filter company, with the memorable closing lines:

Fram Salesman: "So, you can pay me now..."

Engine Mechanic: "...Or you can pay me later."

It may not seem so at first, but investing time and resources in nursing home Quality Improvement (QI) efforts is a type of routine maintenance, too. Done well, it's an investment that pays dividends in the form of increased profitability, not to mention averted legal fees and various regulatory penalties. It's one of those cases in which paying now trumps paying later. A lot of times when long-term care leaders think of QI, however, we think of things like Root Cause Analysis, SBAR forms and graphs. Quality improvement is all of those things, but it's also expert coaching and consultation, it's leadership development, and it's other types of less-traditional tools. Among those tools – and one of the most important – is the Artifacts of Culture Change, designed by Carmen Bowman of Edu-Catering, Inc. and CMS with financial support from the Commonwealth Fund. You can access it for free on the website of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ – a sister agency of CMS) alongside checklists to help prevent wrong-site surgery and physician tool sets for e-prescribing, among other things.

The fact that the Artifacts of Culture Change tool isn't a *traditional* QI instrument is a good reason for long-term care to embrace it as such. In too many other industries, people are regarded as data points for the purposes of QI. The field of long-term care is pioneering person-centered care models and leading a resurgence to re-establish the importance of humanity (the person) in nursing and medicine. The culture change movement is building momentum and gaining national attention. The most innovative development in healthcare in the next decade might be the realization of the power of human caring. Nursing homes might teach it to others.

No one can say for certain what the future holds for long-term care as a field, but adopting more person-centered models of care helps to create more responsive, more adaptable organizations – the types that are best-equipped to respond to whatever challenges lie ahead. In other words, culture change makes business sense, too. Using the Artifacts tool can help you objectively assess how person-centered your nursing home is right now. It can help you view your home in relation to other homes across the country. It will help you find efficiencies and calculate

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the dollars you may save by employing them. It's designed to help you form a vision of the future of your nursing home that can actually be achieved.

Most importantly, though, when you use the Artifacts of Culture Change tool, you're buying into a belief – a belief that when our profession commits resources to QI, we ought to first be measuring things that matter, like the quality of the lives of real people who need our help.

One thing we know from aggregate data collection is that Missouri has the highest number of nursing homes in the country who have used the artifacts tool so far. That's one of many examples of Missouri's leadership with regard to culture change. We know that a substantial number of nursing homes in our state (and the residents who live in those homes) still aren't benefitting from this excellent free resource, though. Please help us spread the word about its importance. If you're not familiar with the Artifacts of Culture Change tool, take a minute to read about it by visiting this website: <http://www.artifactsofculturechange.org/ACCTool/>.

Two popular aphorisms of management are that the goals we accomplish are the ones we measure, and the future doesn't happen on its own, but rather is created by our actions. As long-term care professionals, we can help ensure that the future of healthcare is brighter and that people are better served if we commit to measuring and improving the effect we have on the quality of life of our residents. The Artifacts of Culture Change tool can help us do that. It may seem at times that the culture change movement, given the simplicity of its core concepts, promises more than it can deliver. However, the promise doesn't seem so far-fetched when we understand it as the core of a connected series of concerns that involve aging, dignity, quality of life and what it means to be a person.



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