



Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services

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**Gail Vasterling**  
Acting Director



**Jeremiah W. (Jay) Nixon**  
Governor

March 15, 2013

AN OPEN LETTER  
TO READERS OF THE LTC INFORMATION UPDATE LISTSERV

Dear Readers,

Not too many people get incredibly excited about the publication of new standards for dining in America's nursing homes – that's long been one of our biggest problems. Seventeen years ago, as a teenager, I cleared plates in a nursing home dining room after meal time and cringed at the blended puddles of leftover pureed food and the glasses of water thickened into paste. Over a period of months, through training, I came to believe (like everyone else at that time) that it was necessary for the health of the residents. Now we know it wasn't. Almost two decades have passed, and in some nursing homes, some workers still serve their residents unappealing food in an unnecessarily regimented and institutional manner because they don't know any better. We have to lead them to a better approach. The new Dining Practice Standards, promoted by CMS and drafted by representatives from the country's leading dietary organizations are helping us do that.

These are not new regulations. However, nursing homes may use them to explain and defend changes in their dining practices that are more humane and dignified and person-centered, and I hope they do. Furthermore, they explicitly reference regulatory requirements that surveyors *can* use to cite deficiencies in nursing homes that are failing to meet what experts have begun to recognize not as best practices, but as standards.

To those of us who have worked in long-term care for very long, the strides we've made in the last several years are obvious – our use of restraints has dwindled, our numbers of pressure ulcers have declined and wound care treatment in general has vastly improved. Residents live in more home-like buildings and we care for people in ways which are becoming more person-centered and individualized every day. We finally have a great deal to celebrate.

But we can't afford to live in the past. We have to keep investing – our time, our money, our expertise and ourselves – and one arena in which our continued investment is absolutely crucial is the resident dining experience. The story of long-term care is a legacy of service to others in need. This is a matter that needs our attention. As professionals in long-term care, we commit ourselves to this work because we believe in the importance of improving the lives of those in our communities and our homes. As we begin to focus more closely on quality of care with federally-driven initiatives like QAPI and INTERACT II, we have an obligation to focus more closely on our commitment to the quality of life of our residents and employees, too. The time has come when we can't continue to be satisfied with nonchalant, perfunctory attempts at individualized care or the creation of better living environments. Care is the heart of our work. In our efforts to become more efficient and more effective, we can't lose

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sight of *why* we're improving our processes. Our processes serve our mission; our mission will always be the care of people. Those people are counting on us to get this right.

This is one of the most exciting times ever to be in long-term care. It's our time. As people who spend every day helping others at the ends of their lives, we know better than most how short our time can be. However, if we take advantage of resources such as these Dining Practice Standards and the opportunities for improvement that are facing us now – if we work hard, keeping sight of our mission, our time will be enough to effect fundamental changes for the better that will outlast each of us.

Please join me in implementing and championing these new dining standards – one of the most recent and most important contributions to the bright future of long-term care.

Thank you for your time,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matt Younger', written in a cursive style.

Matt Younger, Administrator  
Section for Long-Term Care Regulation  
Division of Regulation and Licensure