

The Los Angeles Jewish Home for the Aging: A sign of things to come in Alzheimer's care?

Big changes may be ahead for the nursing home industry, which has been largely based on the institutional-like facilities designed back in the 50s and 60s.

An example of this "new look" is the Los Angeles Jewish Home for the Aging (JHA), which is the largest facility of senior housing in the western United States, and which has one of the most modern, evidence-based, Alzheimer's care facilities in the industry.

Not everyone, of course, has their funding and resources, but many of their ideas are simple, but effective, and can be implemented at other types of facilities.



Largest provider in LA

Founded in 1912, the Home is the largest single-source provider of senior housing in Los Angeles.

Each year, nearly 1,000 women and men are sheltered on two village campuses (spanning 16 acres), which feature independent-living "Neighborhood Home" accommodations, residential care, skilled nursing care, Alzheimer's disease and dementia care, and hospice.

Healthcare professionals from around the world consult with the Jewish Home in an effort to improve eldercare in their home countries.

Standing at the center of JHA is the just-opened Joyce Eisenberg-Keefer Medical Center, which CEO Molly Forrest says is one of the most comprehensive and sophisticated specialized medical facilities found in residential facilities.

It features a unique 249-bed design that affords easy access to specialized medical care and programs within a distinctive residential setting.

The center is in large part the result of record community support for the Jewish Home's most recent

capital campaign initiated by the Home's board of directors, says Forrest.

An interdisciplinary team of healthcare professionals supports residents with medical, psychiatric, psychological and rehabilitative services.

According to Rick Smith, M.D., the Jewish Home's medical director, by combining medical with cognitive rehabilitation therapies, nutrition, and support services, the Jewish Home provides center residents with the highest level of care.

"This is a special place for our residents," he said. "It represents the way medicine should be - doing our best to ensure quality of life now and help prevent severe loss of quality of life in the future."

Forrest said the Medical Center is the latest step in an ongoing plan to maintain the Home's pioneering efforts in eldercare.

"As a nonprofit organization with a strong mission and history of service, we firmly believe in investing in healthy living programs and facilities that reinforce life and are focused on quality living each day."



A beauty salon and spa, computer centers, a deli, and creative arts studios have all been integrated into the center, and by doing so reflect the Home's philosophy of offering unique programs for the body, mind and spirit, said Forrest.

The center utilizes the latest design innovations featuring distinctive groupings of individual rooms to create smaller resident community "neighborhoods" that are easily identifiable to residents and visitors. Such novel touches as fish tanks and aviaries punctuate the innovative property.

The center also includes the Brandman Research Institute, which encompasses the inpatient acute psychiatric care unit as well as innovative research, treatment programs; and activities "to build and maintain the body, mind and spirit of the elderly in need."

"As many people age they are faced with new psychiatric or psychological challenges, which we need to be prepared to meet," Forrest said.

"Statistically, men over 65 years old are twice as likely as any other age group to commit suicide. Also, a full one-third of our residents have outlived their children. Our new psychiatric center will help our residents get through these and other life experiences, which directly affect their quality of life."

Alzheimer's care

Experts have long been aware that environment can play an important role in caring for victims of Alzheimer's disease. Therefore, the warmth and reassurance of "home" is vitally important, say JHA's medical personnel.

The Home's Paul Goldenberg•Daphna and Richard Ziman Special Care Center for Alzheimer's disease and age-related dementia opened in 2002, and is a facility that "the world can learn from and replicate" says Forrest.



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“Unfortunately, Alzheimer’s care facilities of the past have often sacrificed a homelike feeling in favor of safety and security,” she adds.

“Today, the best expert research is leading the way to Alzheimer’s care environments that are long on warmth and comfort while still providing optimum safety and care.”

JHA has attempted to overcome some of those problems with its new design features. Buildings have exterior architectural features that have been “softened.” Skylights and generous windows allow sunlight to come flooding in, and the lovely landscaping is visible from within the building at virtually every turn.

Since Alzheimer’s sufferers seem to control agitation levels through wandering and constant motion, the floor plans incorporate curves and circular shape, to ensure that residents never come to a dead end, and experience the debilitating confusion that almost always requires staff intervention.

All design features were developed as the result of evidence-based research, and include:

- Memory boxes located at each doorway to help orient residents. Filled with memorabilia (e.g. old photos, ballet slippers, a favorite book, etc.) the resident will recognize these significant objects from their life and know they’ve reached home.
- Architectural design that simulates a home-like setting with built-in “way-finding” themes. Visual clues that are recognizable by even advanced Alzheimer’s patients assist with way finding, providing markers to guide them to their rooms, dining facilities, activities and common areas.
- A village town-square concept is incorporated into the design. The building is designed in circular, connected clusters, with a central hub that has the charming, inviting atmosphere of a village town square. This includes a coffee shop and beauty parlor. The “coffee shop” provides much-needed nourishment and hydrations for Alzheimer’s and dementia victims who often need to be encouraged to eat and drink.
- Skylights and numerous oversized windows in resident rooms and common areas allow natural sunlight exposure, which help the body respond to its natural circadian rhythms.
- Flooring is in muted tones so Alzheimer’s sufferers won’t become confused when faced with flooring that has color blocks (and feel the need to carefully step over or around darker spaces, greatly increasing the risk of serious injury from falls).
- Vocal control rooms for residents who need to be distracted from stress and over-stimulation – two of the disease’s traits. These insulated rooms



feature special lighting, colorful mobiles and environmental sound machines which simulate a variety of nature sounds that help to redirect the attention of an over-anxious resident.

In addition to its attention to detail relative to physical design, the staff utilizes many pioneering techniques on behalf of its residents including:

- “Person-first” programming incorporating the “universal-worker” concept where all staff members are involved in the residents’ care. The staff takes ownership of “life happiness” in the unit.
- Nutrition program on weight loss and dementia – Specific and unique protocols were developed to target residents who suffer from weight loss. Specially trained staff encourages and socializes with the residents during meals and special snack times.
- “Learning Circles” engage even the most confused residents using special methods that provide an opportunity to hear from each individual present to reminisce, participate and have the experience of inclusiveness in the Goldenberg • Ziman community.
- Recreational programming – Tailored to fit the residents’ short attention span, the specific programs provide structure while also creating opportunities to utilize past-life skills while maximizing their independence.
- Baby grand pianos, spinets and even electric pianos are spaced throughout the Special Care Center with a spectacular baby grand gracing the entrance foyer. Residents and guests so inclined are encouraged to sit and play.

“The fate of senior care tomorrow, for much of the population, is something we believe needs to be addressed today,” Forrest said. “As a result, we should provide the best... and that’s what we try every day to accomplish at the Jewish Home for the Aging.” END