

Service Learning Project Critical Reflection

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By 2035, it is projected that 21% of the American population will be 65 years old or older, a phenomenon that the U.S. Census Bureau has coined as “The Graying of America” (Vespa, 2021). The magnitude surrounding the aging Baby Boomer generation will greatly impact various healthcare settings, most notably organizations that deal with the end of life, showing why these corporations are so important. Compassionate Care Hospice (CCH) is an Amedisys ran company, which is one of the leading healthcare providers in the country and serves hundreds of thousands of patients a year. CCH works to ensure the utmost quality at the end of life as they emphasize how precious each person’s life is, no matter the age. In order to qualify for CCH services, one must be given a diagnosis of less than 6 months left to live, and while for the most part patients are in their 70s, 80s, or 90s, there are still patients who are even in their 20s. The foundations of Amedisys are illustrated as the acronym SPIRIT: Service, Passion, Integrity, Respect, Innovation, and Talent, which displays the company’s commitment to engaging in the highest levels of integrity and ethical practices available. This directly coincides with the core values of health promotion. Their mission is to provide holistic and compassionate care to each patient and their respective families, increase access to hospice care, and disseminate resources to educate communities on options pertaining to the end of life. Their purpose is to enable patients to age in a place where they are most comfortable—their home. When most people think about hospice, they tend to just think of the in-home nurses, however this worksite is composed of a myriad of professionals, including social workers, counselors, medical directors, and even chaplains so that each patient can access the resources to provide the most comfort during the end of their life. The Athens site serves over 18 areas in a radius outside of its central business location and sends any of their 3 nurses to patients in this area 24/7.

To be honest, there was not a ton of work given to volunteers and most days I would go in for my 3-hour shift and sit in a cubicle studying and try to overhear what the other workers were discussing so that I could gain at least some knowledge. Although volunteering at hospice does not sound all like rainbows and butterflies, I was eager to work here just to gain some valuable hands-on experience and hopefully obtain some helpful contacts for my future in healthcare. We were supposed to help answer phone calls and redirect them to the correct team member, and organize the closets of resources (diapers, syringes, gauze, etc.) to make the nurses lives easier, however we were never trained to answer calls and I was never asked or directed to manage supplies. I usually am never one to shy away when working with professionals and when asking if and where help is needed, however I did not feel equipped or comfortable to speak up because most times the office was relatively quiet and already organized. I would try to hear some of the workers discussions, whether it be with coworkers, families of patients, or higher up directors. This is where I learned the most during my time volunteering. I could always immediately tell when a professional was on the phone with a family member or loved one of a patient because there was a sense of genuity and sincerity in their voices. They were always clear and straightforward so that they could provide necessary information for lay populations. I could really tell that these workers were passionate about their patients. When conversating with directors or higher up positions, it was always regarding numbers, whether it be mortality rates or number of supplies. I will never forget the first time I heard one worker disclose that they had “no deaths that day, which was the first day in 5 days” which just really put into perspective the emotional aspects of this field. The first day I volunteered one lady told me that the youngest patient they had served was just 26 years old, 5 years older than me, which terrified me. Although I was never tasked with much to do, I was able to overhear and see firsthand all the

moving and coordinated parts to ensure patient care and enable patients to keep their sense of dignity at the end of their life.

Albeit there were not many skills gained from volunteering at CCH, there are still valuable lessons that I can carry with me into my future path in healthcare. Up until this semester I thought I wanted to work in a clinical setting, but I recently decided to switch to pre-law with aspirations of going into healthcare law or policy in some capacity. Volunteering at CCH showed me the interconnectedness of health insurance with Medicare services and how there are hundreds of legal issues that can arise throughout these operations. When thinking about the vast number of non-governmental organizations that serve all ages and demographics in both healthy and unhealthy conditions displays the magnitude and pertinence of law in healthcare. It serves to ensure that each entity is operating by ethical means and following policies to protect all parties involved. The value of engaging in ethical behaviors furthers my understanding of service because I learned that the only way to truly serve others is by engaging in ethical practices professionally, but just as importantly in everyday life so that one's actions may not be contradicted, and their words and service be revered. Overall, I learned just how many moving parts, people, resources, time, etc. go into providing the best services catered to each individual patient, which I think is applicable to any profession I will endeavor. The importance of efficiency and maintaining smooth operations between each position is vital in the success of the company. The handouts given out at the beginning of the semester pertaining to the policies of Amedisys and CCH mention the importance of anonymity and confidentiality in order to protect individuals several times, displaying how essential these components are to any profession within healthcare. Lastly, I learned how truly valuable of an asset passion is to have with work. I could tell very quickly if someone enjoyed their job or not by how passionate and caring they

were towards the loved ones of patients. Being passionate about a cause increases productivity, serving capabilities, and a sense of self, which I now value a great deal and when pursuing various future careers in healthcare law or policy, will likely be influenced on my level of passion about the cause.

Works Cited

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