

TRAINING STAFF TO SUPPORT A JEWISH MILIEU

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In addition, recognizing the key role of Judaism in resident life, efforts are made to link major secular education programs to religious and traditional perspectives. "Death, Dying and Bereavement" and "Dignity, Privacy and Sexual Expression" are examples of these linkages in which multiple-part, staff training programs are inaugurated with an understanding of relevant Jewish ethics and laws pertaining to these topics.

INTRODUCTION

Jews have long preferred to seek services from agencies that are under Jewish auspices and that maintain a Jewish identification. They feel that an agency's Jewish "atmosphere" will ensure that care will be provided by personnel attuned to the Jewish experiences, as well as respectful of individual religious and cultural needs.¹ Yet, given the disparity that currently exists, and will undoubtedly continue between the religious and ethnic identities of service recipients and providers of these services,² alternative approaches to religious and ethnic congruence must be developed.

This article will describe the evolution and impact of a staff training and education program developed at the Hebrew Home for the Aged at Riverdale (HHAR), which builds upon such ethnic diversity to

support the existence and value of a Jewish milieu. A review of the literature is also provided as a framework for the importance of such an environment for the elderly. While this paper addresses practice in institutional, long-term care, it has applicability to community-based services programs as well.

Social gerontologic theory suggests that successful aging is based upon the continuity of life patterns. Ethnicity does, in fact, operate as a mediator in problem-solving issues of aging in its ability to counteract ambiguity, identity loss, isolation, alienation, valuelessness, and normlessness.³ Further, the persistence of culture and religious traditions which residents bring with them to a long-term care setting, has been identified as easing the adjustment to institutional life. In-

1. Sir Immanuel Jakobovitz, "Ethical Guidelines for an Aging Jewish World." Read at the Symposium on Aging in the Jewish World, 1985.

2. Rochel U. Berman, "A Judaic Journey Creates Communications; In-service Education for Staff of a Jewish Home," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (Summer, 1981), pp. 61-67.

3. Nadine Brozan, "Ethnic Identity and Old Age," *The New York Times*, July 22, 1985; Carol S. Holzberg, "Ethnicity and Aging: Anthropological Perspectives on More than Just the Minority Elderly," *The Gerontologist*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (June, 1982), pp. 249-257; Eva and Boaz Kahane, "Jews," in E. B. Palmore, ed., *Handbook on the Aged in the U.S.* Westport, Conn., and London: Greenwood Press, 1984.

dividual function can be encouraged in terms of and consistent with previous life roles.

Experiences, personal beliefs and comfort are at the core of milieu continuity. For the current generation of service-dependent aged, the influence of Jewish family life is predominant; they lived in a Jewish milieu with Yiddish as a common language.⁴ Having undergone actual or perceived displacement and uprooting in their lives, this generation of Jewish aged seeks a sense of connectedness and continuity with their people, to maintain and affirm their common Jewish heritage.⁵

A recent survey of applicants to the Hebrew Home for the Aged at Riverdale indicated that the Orthodox Jewish nature of the facility was a principal reason for its selection. While the Home's "reputation for quality care" was cited as the most important consideration, the religious aspects of the facility were a consideration ranked above ambiance, location, and/or physician referral. This further emphasizes the essential role of a Jewish milieu in decision-making by the aged and their families.

In the United States, longevity has been associated with those characteristics traditionally valued within Jewish communities: good prenatal and infant care; lifetime use of health services; increased education and economic, occupational and class status.⁶ It is therefore not surprising that these factors combined with low fertility levels among Jewish-women will result in an increase in the cohort of individuals aged 65-plus years among Jews from 15.7 percent to 20.1 percent of the Jewish population within the next 25

years, well above their proportion of 11.3 percent in the general population.

In absolute numbers, Schmelz⁷ projected an increase of the 65-plus Jewish population from an estimated 880,000 in 1980 to 960,000 in 1985. A recent study of Jewish elderly suggests that its increasing number is resulting in both greater visibility as well as increasing service demands.⁸ While it is anticipated that utilization of institutional services by the Jewish aged is consistent with national trends, i.e., five percent of the aged over 65 and 20 percent of the aged over age 85, the existing 24,571 institutional beds under Jewish auspices are able currently to accommodate only one-half of all aged Jewish individuals needing this level of care.⁹ Further, it should be recognized that these issues are not exclusively related to this generation of aged. Kahane indicates that "tomorrow's elderly are not likely to be significantly less identified with Judaism than today's aged in spite of acculturation."¹⁰

Currently, social and religious activities in Jewish Homes do indicate a commitment to provide a Jewishly oriented environment through religious services, celebration of Jewish holidays, kosher food, a rabbi on staff, and so forth.¹¹ The authors suggest that the Jewish milieu, in its broadest cultural and ethnic perspective, is based upon both religious laws and traditions as well as the residents' shared history, collective identity, sense of peoplehood, unique heritage and tradition, common expectations, values, attitudes and meaningful symbols. In addition to its spiritual and personal value,

4. Bernard Warach, "The Status of the Jewish Elderly in the United States." Read to the Symposium on Aging in the Jewish World, 1985.

5. Kahane, *op. cit.*

6. Leonard Gottesman & Elias Cohen, "Meeting the Challenge of the Rapid Increase in the Needs of the Disabled Elderly." Read at the Symposium on Aging in the Jewish World, 1985.

7. U. O. Schmelz and S. D. Pergola, "The Demographic Consequences of U.S. Population Trends," *American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 83. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983.

8. Ira Rosenwaike, "The American Jewish Elderly in Transition," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 62, No. 4 (Summer, 1986), pp. 283-291.

9. Gottesman & Cohen, *op. cit.*

10. Kahane, *op. cit.*

11. Warach, *op. cit.*

ethnicity is also a resource in its ability to link the past, present and future and its opportunity for continued inner growth and creativity.¹²

The educational program which this article will detail addresses these myriad components of the Jewish milieu, and the specific implications of this training model for direct patient care.

TRAINING SITE

The Hebrew Home for the Aged at Riverdale is an 1100 bed long-term care facility in the Bronx, New York, providing services within an ICF/HRF, SNF, and congregate housing setting. The Jewish identity of the Home is transmitted to staff through concrete symbols, staffing and programs including: the existence of a synagogue, Judaica art in public lobbies and corridors, a kosher kitchen, a ritual laver adjacent to the main resident dining room, *mezuzzot* on all the doorposts, a full-time rabbi and *mashgiach*, Orthodox holiday and religious observances and intergenerational holiday programs.

The understanding of ritual objects and ceremonies has been enhanced since the construction, in 1985, of a multi-media display module entitled, "The Sights and Sounds of the Jewish Experience." The module is a 14-foot circular structure made up of a series of eight-foot portable panels which create a partially enclosed display gallery in a centrally located lounge within the Home. Throughout the year, it features exhibits of each of the Jewish holidays and festivals, and a variety of historical and cultural phenomena. Ceremonial objects, artworks, and photographs are displayed with descriptive labels. A sound track including text and music and a lighted slide show provide added dimen-

sions to both the enjoyment and edification of staff, residents and families who visit the changing exhibits.

While admissions policies to the Home are non-sectarian, as would be anticipated for an Orthodox Jewish facility, 99 percent of the resident population are Jewish.

Currently, approximately 80 percent of the residents are European born (essentially Eastern Europe), a decrease of approximately 10 percent in the past decade. The average age of the residents is 86 1/2 years; their length of stay almost five years.

In contrast, the Home's staff of 1000-plus persons is ethnically diverse, drawn from and representative of the neighboring communities of the Bronx and Yonkers. Eighty to eighty-five percent are of racial or ethnic minorities, including American and Caribbean Blacks, Portuguese, Hispanics, Filipinos and (other) Orientals. Although accurate statistics are not available, it is estimated that 30 percent to 40 percent of the staff are American born. While the ability to speak English is a requirement of employment, English is a second language for some 20 percent of the staff. Similar to the resident population, the staff are also of long-standing tenure; more than 70 percent have worked at the Home for five or more years.¹³

THE TRAINING PROGRAM

Past work has described this facility's programs to "acculturate" a multi-cultural staff to understand and respect major Jewish holidays and traditions,¹⁴ as well as an elective training program to further bridge the cultural and ethnic gap.¹⁵ This article builds upon these earlier

12. Celia Weisman, "The Needs of the Jewish Elderly: What's Happened to Spirituality?" Read at the Symposium on Aging in the Jewish World, 1985; also Holzberg, *op. cit.*

13. Rochel Berman, Audrey Weiner, & Gella Fishman, "Yiddish—It's More Than a Language: In-service Training for Staff of Jewish Home for the Aged," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 62, No. 4, (Summer, 1986), pp. 328-334.

14. Berman, "A Judaic Journey . . .," *op. cit.*

15. Berman, *et al.*, *op. cit.*

statements, developing a conceptual framework, annual training calendar and concerted institutional supports.

The organization of this education program is based upon a number of fundamental premises:

1. Judaica education programs are linked to the religious, traditional, ritual, ethnic, spiritual, historic and experiential aspects of the Jewish life of the resident population.

2. Judaica education programs receive the same high level administrative support and sanction as all other institutional training programs. They are offered during the regular work day, on varying shifts, with resources available for (modest) honoraria and videotaping of sessions.

3. Programs are designed to be interdisciplinary and participatory, utilizing basic and competent adult education principles.¹⁶

4. Judaica education programs are planned one year in advance, in concert with institutional in-service planning activities, to effectively incorporate the 10 to 12 programs conducted annually.

5. Record keeping requirements for Judaica education programs are consistent with other in-service programs, thereby supporting New York State and institutional requirements for minimum staff in-service attendance.

The foundation for Judaica in-service begins at the day-long, monthly orientation program for new staff. A videotape which provides an overview of the Home's programs and services addresses the role and importance of individual religious beliefs. In addition, the rabbi addresses the group on the basic elements of the

observances of *kashruth* and *Shabbat*.

Building upon the experiences of the past five years, HHAR's Judaic education program has a core curriculum which is complemented and supplemented by a series of changing electives. The core curriculum, repeated annually, includes sessions on Rosh Hashanah-Yom Kippur; Sukkoth-Simchat Torah; Hanukkah; Purim; Passover, and Shavout. Each training program is held within two weeks of the holiday.

Registration is solicited via an inter-office flyer to department heads, with resultant staff attendance reflective of individual departmental styles; i.e., either by assignment or personal choice. To maximize attendance, location varies and includes the in-service classroom, specific nursing units, specific departments, the *sukkah* and most recently the Home's display module, "Sights and Sounds of the Jewish Experience" (described above). Efforts are also made to rotate the core curriculum between the shifts.

Sessions are approximately 45 minutes long and include: history of the specific holiday; the traditional manner of celebration; a discussion of the symbols; a sampling of traditional food; the implications for the institutionalized elderly (e.g., psychosocial, familial, practical); ways in which staff are expected to be responsive and helpful; specific plans for resident programs and celebration; and questions and answers. Appropriate handouts are distributed. The average session attendance is 30 staff members.

The session on Passover does depart from this format. In lieu of a didactic presentation, a "mini Seder" is held. During the Seder, staff are seated around a festive holiday table, actively participating in reciting key passages of the Haggadah (in English), singing the refrains of traditional songs and partaking of the symbolic food. Each staff person who attends receives a small Haggadah with English translation. This modified service is almost an

16. Nora S. Ernst and Helen S. West, *Nursing Home Staff Development: A Guide for Inservice Programs*. New York: Springer, 1983.

exact replica of the one provided for the more infirm SNF patients who are unable to participate in the traditional Seder as a function of their health problems.

Electives: Each year, three or four additional topics are offered either discretely or within a workshop format. Based upon the college concept of electives, these topics are varied annually, and are reflective of specific resident education programs, current events, or staff requests. Single sessions offered heretofore have included: The State of Israel, The Holocaust, the role of the synagogue and rituals pertaining to prayer, history and the practical applications of *Kashruth*, and a visit to the Home's Judaica Museum. A series of four sessions on the Yiddish language¹⁷ has been offered two consecutive years as a result of enthusiasm and specific staff requests. Organization, registration and content development are similar to other programs.

In addition, recognizing the key role of Judaism in resident life, efforts are made to link major secular education programs to religious and traditional perspectives. "Death, Dying and Bereavement" and "Dignity, Privacy and Sexual Expression" are examples of these linkages in which multiple-part, staff training programs are inaugurated with an understanding of relevant Jewish ethics and laws pertaining to these topics.

The presentation on "Death, Dying and Bereavement" included the importance of the interplay of family, community and faith in according dignity to the deceased, and providing support for the mourners. Key concepts such as *Hevrah Kadisha* (the "holy brotherhood" that prepare the body for burial), *shomrim* ("watchers" who sit with the body until burial), "*Kaddish*" (prayer for the dead), *k'riah* (tearing of a section of the mourner's garment), *yahrzeit* (anniversary of death), and *Yizkor* (the

memorial prayer recited on key holidays) were discussed. A complete glossary of terms was provided for all attendees.

The session on the "Jewish Views of Sex and the Older Person" indicated that "sexual relations are not only permitted but required, even in situations where no possibility exists for conception. Highly significant, too, in this regard is the bible's attitude to remarriage of the old after the loss of a spouse. Families who try to prevent their old parents from 'being foolish' are expressing prejudices unacceptable to traditional Jewish practice."¹⁸

Planning and Staffing: The Judaica education program is coordinated by the administrator responsible for staff in-service in conjunction with the Director of Community Affairs and the Assistant Director of Nursing, responsible for education. At a single planning meeting (generally held in August), decisions are made for topics and dates. These are then reviewed with the Home's rabbi who serves as a consultant to the program. While the rabbi does conduct orientation for new staff, demands on his time preclude his teaching other classes. Presenters for single sessions are community rabbis or educators who provide this service voluntarily. They are carefully selected for their ability to engage a group and make the Jewish experience understandable to an uninformed audience. Educators who provide a series of sessions such as the Yiddish workshops are offered an honorarium. In addition to the presenter, each session is attended by a HHAR staff person who is knowledgeable about the topic and the Home's policy and practices. It is the responsibility of this resource person to link the material discussed to the special needs of the institutionalized aged population.

17. Berman, *et al.*, *op. cit.*

18. Benjamin Blech, "Judaism and Gerontology, Tradition," *A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thoughts*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Summer, 1977), pp. 62-77.

PROGRAM IMPACT

Evaluation of the impact of this training program is based upon feedback from staff, direct observation, anecdotal report and pilot data from a questionnaire developed to ascertain relevant knowledge.

Specific benefits of the training program can be categorized as follows:

1. Inclusion of ritual, tradition, and holiday components in recreational and therapeutic activities including music, crafts, sensory stimulation, reminiscence therapy, life review, communication groups, speech therapy groups, discussion groups, and the like.
2. Improvement of staff's ability to prepare for and participate in the celebration of each holiday.
3. Preparation of staff to anticipate the health care issues relevant to each holiday, for example, medication refusal on Yom Kippur and Passover.
4. Encouragement of the organization of Department Head holiday greetings on each SNF unit and in the HRF (ICF) main dining room.
5. The use of Yiddish for resident-staff conversations and the resultant development of an immediate sense of comfort and trust.
6. Development of general staff sensitivities to the holidays.

After the hour-long session, (on Passover) . . . a nursing supervisor who is not Jewish saw a universal message in the Rabbi's remarks. It has parallels in all religious life, she said, and since Passover comes so close to Easter it is really a time for sharing.¹⁹

7. Increased opportunities for public relations and improved and enhanced community relations as typified by the above quote from the *New York Times*.

Given the expenditure of resources to plan and coordinate this program, HHAR Administration was also interested in determining the resultant knowledge level of staff. To accomplish this a five category questionnaire has been developed which addresses:

1. The meaning of holidays and festivals.
2. Major holidays on which work is not permitted.
3. Traditional foods.
4. Artifacts and customs.
5. Location of key ritual objects and sites.

Recently, this questionnaire was piloted with 24 HHAR Department Heads and administrative staff. Within this group, the average length of employment is nine years; 62 percent of these individuals are Jewish. Average scores on each section, and total scores and awareness of the Home's training programs are noted below.

RESULTS OF PILOT
TEST-KNOWLEDGE QUESTIONNAIRE

N = 24	
Item	Average Score (Percent)
Total Questionnaire	85.5
Holidays and Festivals	67.0
Holidays Permitted to Work	87.5
Traditional Foods	95.0
Artifacts and Customs	90.0
Jewish Locations in Home	100.0
Awareness of Staff In-service	100.0
Attendance at In-service	62.0

LIMITATIONS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS

While the knowledge level of Department Heads was high, the gaps in knowledge, as indicated by the results of the questionnaire, suggest that additional in-service was required on the less well-known Jewish holidays including: *Yom Ha-Shoaha*, *Yom Ha-Atzma'ut*, *Lag B'omer*, and *Tisha B'av*. In addition, despite ef-

19. Ari L. Goldman, "Nursing-Home Workers Get Lesson on Whys of Passover," *The New York Times*, April 12, 1984.

forts to conduct in-service on all shifts, additional focus and emphasis are required, most especially for the night and evening shifts. Clearly, to accomplish this, reliance on community resources is not practical. Therefore, HHAR would plan to utilize its own staff resources more frequently to accomplish this training on a 24-hour basis.

While the training was initially designed for the benefit of non-Jewish personnel, it has, in fact, had considerable benefit for Jewish staff as well. Knowledge of "Yiddishkeit" on the part of the latter ranges from those who are only marginally familiar to those who have had extensive formal training. There seems, however, to be some embarrassment for some Jewish staff about their lack of knowledge. This indicates that special sensitivity is required in the outreach efforts. It is interesting to note, that even those for whom the Jewish experience had been an integral part of their lives bore witness to the Talmudic tenet "one who studies his lessons 100 times is not the equal of one who studies them 101 times."

Based upon the success of the participatory Passover in-service, adaptation of this model to other holidays is also planned. Finally, the nature of curiosity suggests that conducting the in-service programs in open, visible areas is important as that also serves to attract additional staff, visitor interest as well as resident participation.

The pilot test of Jewish knowledge as a function of its non-threatening nature is also being viewed as a motivational tech-

nique. Beginning in the Fall (1986), it will be utilized with professional staff members, in the context of learning, to heighten interest as well as for repeated measures.

It is also recognized that since this training facilitates a better understanding between diverse cultures, the programs which address staff ethnic groups should be planned for residents and all staff. Two other outgrowths of this training are visualized for HHAR. First, it is anticipated that the Home will make this training available to local community non-Jewish facilities, with known high proportions of Jewish clients, so that they can provide it for their staff. Also planned is the development of training manuals and activities related to holidays and traditions for use with moderately to severely demented patients.

SUMMARY

Although the evaluation is not based upon rigorous design, the authors have empirical evidence that this training program is effective, relevant and important in supporting the existence of a Jewish milieu. It recognizes the vital and valuable role of all staff members and, in so doing, enhances their caregiving.

Finally, while the model of orientation, core curriculum and electives may be too demanding for some agencies, we hope this article has offered motivation and options which can be replicated in whole or in part within any setting.