Alzheimer’s and Dementia Care Regulations for Massachusetts Nursing Homes

Effective March 1, 2014

On Wednesday February 12, 2014 the Massachusetts Public Health Council voted unanimously to accept the Public Health Department’s updated Dementia Special Care Unit Regulations for Nursing Homes. These regulations are the result of passage of legislation in 2012 that required the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) to create regulations for nursing homes to assure quality care in dementia special care units (DSCU). Prior to this legislation, Alzheimer and dementia care in Massachusetts nursing homes had no specific requirements under the law.

SUMMARY:

Training for direct care workers, activities directors and supervisors of direct care workers in DSCUs and also traditional units

- Direct care workers must receive 8 hours of specialized dementia care training and 4 hours of ongoing dementia training annually.
- Training shall be completed within a timely manner: 90 days for DSCU workers and 180 for traditional unit workers.
- Training will be composed of introduction to dementia and dementia care as well as other modules including, but not limited to, behavior management, communications skills, personal care, and therapeutic activities.
- Training will be at least partially interactive, reflect current best practices for dementia care, be culturally appropriate and will include an evaluation that must be passed by each employee

Therapeutic Activities

- Any facility that operates a DSCU will be required to have a therapeutic activities director who is certified as a recreation therapist or activities professional or has 2 or more years’ experience in a recreational program for patients or residents in health care or is a qualified occupational therapist or assistant.
- A minimum of 8 hours a day, throughout the day and evening hours, of therapeutic activities are required in a DSCU. Two (2) of these hours may be unplanned opportunities for meaningful engagement but must also be documented. The remaining 6 must be planned, posted and documented and all activities must be geared to sustain the physical and emotional wellness of each resident and be meaningful purposeful and cognitively stimulation.

Disclosure Statements

- Any nursing home that advertises dementia specific care must provide the general public with access to a disclosure statement (produced by MDPH) as well as to prospective and current residents. These statements will also be posted in a conspicuous place in the facility as well. The statements will disclose all care and services relevant to specialized dementia care that is provided as well as staffing levels, activities hours and other pertinent information to assist in informing consumers.
Physical Design

- DSCUs will have a home-like environment that provides quality of life, comfort and safety measures. A common area will be provided to serve meals, do activities and provide an area for residents to relax and congregate. Doors will be secured to prevent wandering. An outdoor area for residents to walk, assisted or unassisted, will be provided, with fencing or barriers to prevent wandering. Additionally, lighting, décor, noise control, and color scheme will reflect best practices in meeting the specific needs of residents with Alzheimer's and related dementias.

The complete regulations will be made available via a link on our website as soon as they are published by the Commonwealth. If you have complaints about Alzheimer care in nursing homes, please contact our 24/7 Helpline 800.272.3900, or DPH’s 24-hour consumer complaint line, 800.462.5540.

Background

Over the course of nearly a year, the Alzheimer's Association and Massachusetts Department of Public Health, representatives from community health organizations and the nursing home industry, and families who have experienced Alzheimer's disease worked to develop these regulations to enhance quality of care and quality of life for residents in Massachusetts nursing homes.

For information on advocacy on behalf of Alzheimer’s issues, contact Jennifer Carter.

Otherwise, for any questions about care choices call our 24/7 Helpline 800.272.3900