

Hebrew Home Family Council First Annual Report: July 2010-June 2011

The Hebrew Home Family Council, an independent organization of families and friends of Hebrew Home residents, was launched on July 15, 2010. Its mission is to promote and improve the quality of life of all residents of the Hebrew Home by (1) meeting monthly to discuss and take actions related to improving the care, well-being, and quality of life of all Hebrew Home residents; (2) serving as a resource to support and educate family members and friends of Hebrew Home residents about topics of interest related to aging and eldercare; and (3) communicating with and making recommendations to Hebrew Home administration and staff for the purpose of promoting, achieving, and sustaining the best quality of life possible for all Hebrew Home residents.

Over the past year, the Family Council has focused on six main activities:

1. Adopting an organizational structure, including approval of a mission statement, bylaws, and a privacy policy to guide our operations
2. Establishing effective working relationships with Hebrew Home leadership and staff
3. Identifying and responding to Family Council members' concerns about the need to improve quality of care and communication with Hebrew Home staff
4. Providing feedback and recommendations to help improve dining services
5. Inviting local schools and organizations to entertain at the Hebrew Home
6. Providing educational programs for family members.

The summary below describes the Family Council's efforts over the past year in each of these areas. Our impact is evolving; however, thanks to the support of the Hebrew Home leadership, the Family Council is now an active participant in efforts to help make the Hebrew Home the premier long-term care facility in suburban Maryland. Our members share the Hebrew Home's 2011 goal of "resident dignity and respect," and we look forward to working with administration and staff in the coming year to ensure the best resident-centered care possible.

1. Adopting an Organizational Structure

The first few meetings of the Family Council focused on drafting and adopting the Family Council's mission statement, bylaws, and privacy policy. These documents are available upon request by email to hhcouncil@comcast.net. In addition to Co-Chairs Toby Levin and Carolyn Levine, the Family Council has 5 subcommittees – Activities, Communication, Dining Services, Education, and Quality of Care Review. Each subcommittee has two appointed co-chairs, who report to the Family Council during monthly meetings. Subcommittee co-chairs for the past year were:

Activities – Gail Blatt and Ellen Ehrlich
Communication – Carolyn Levine and Marcia King
Dining Services – Merrill Goldsmith and Toby Levin
Education – Marcia King and Carolyn Levine
Quality of Care Review – Toby Levin and Robin Gerber

To promote the Family Council, the Communication Subcommittee drafted a brochure describing the Council's mission and the rights of family councils under the 1987 Federal Nursing Home Reform Act. The Hebrew Home provided graphic design and printing assistance. The brochure is now available at the front desks of the Wasserman and Smith-Kogod Buildings and is included in the Hebrew Home's admission packets. The Subcommittee is working with senior leadership to include the brochures in quarterly care plan meeting announcements.

The Family Council Co-Chairs prepare minutes of every meeting summarizing speaker presentations, subcommittee reports, and issues discussed. Minutes and announcements are circulated to Family Council members via email from the Family Council email box, hhcouncil@comcast.net, and to the Hebrew Home leadership and department directors. Currently, the email membership list consists of 52 participants and three members of the Montgomery County Long-Term Care Ombudsmen Program.

Eileen Bennett, Director of the Montgomery County Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, and Art Lappen and Percy Poulos, Ombudsmen for the Smith-Kogod and Wasserman Buildings, respectively, regularly attend Family Council meetings and serve as an informational resource to the Family Council. We are greatly indebted to their support during the past year.

2. Establishing Effective Working Relationships with Hebrew Home Leadership and Staff

The Family Council Co-Chairs and Subcommittee Co-Chairs have reached out to Hebrew Home leadership and staff to develop important lines of communication and cooperation. Hebrew Home leadership and staff have been very receptive to Family Council feedback and suggestions and have supported our activities by providing meeting space, mailings, printing, copying, meeting announcements on TV monitors, and the use of a conference room and telephone line during meetings to facilitate participation by out-of-town members. All of these actions have contributed greatly to the establishment of the Family Council. We particularly thank Executive Assistant Sharon Levin for always responding promptly and graciously to all questions and requests over the past year.

Two Hebrew Home staff members have served as liaisons to the Family Council during this first year — Director of Social Work Alicia Flores until November 2010, followed by

Barbara Hirsch, Vice President of Quality and Corporate Compliance. Both served as helpful resources to the Council.

The Family Council Co-Chairs have met with Hebrew Home leadership and department directors to share members' concerns and recommendations. These meetings have demonstrated that we share the same goals and that the Family Council's views and recommendations are given serious consideration. From the outset, the Family Council has sought to support Hebrew Home operations by providing constructive feedback and suggestions, an approach that has generated useful dialogue and cooperation.

One successful cooperative initiative this year was to create an award for General Nursing Assistants (GNAs). The purpose of the award is to encourage and reward exemplary service and promote a high standard of care for all Hebrew Home residents. The GNA award has been accepted into the Hebrew Home's Shining Star Program. On a quarterly basis, the Family Council will nominate GNAs from Wasserman and Smith-Kogod to receive the award, with one award recipient from each building selected by the Hebrew Home. The first set of nominations was submitted at the end of May, and the awards will be announced in July.¹ The Family Council hopes this award will reward GNAs who truly serve as "companions" for residents and who communicate well with family members.

3. Identifying and Responding to Family Council Members' Concerns

A core role for the Family Council has been to serve as eyes and ears for Hebrew Home residents and to share their observations and concerns with Hebrew Home leadership and staff. We have served this role in a number of ways. First, we have invited leadership and department directors to Family Council meetings to brief members on programs and initiatives and to respond to members' questions and feedback. Guest speakers at Family Council meetings during the past year included: Barbara Hirsch, Vice President of Quality and Corporate Compliance; Alicia Flores, Director of Social Work; Dave Figel, Dining Services General Manager; Rhonda Brandes, Clinical Nutrition Manager; and Rabbi James Michaels.

Second, we have conveyed concerns to leadership and staff on behalf of our members through face-to-face meetings and communication through the Family Council liaisons. Many of the concerns are noted in Family Council minutes, which are circulated to Hebrew Home leadership and department directors.

¹ The Family Council will work with senior leadership to plan the Shining Star awards ceremony. The criteria for the GNA nominations focused on identifying exemplary service: (1) treating each resident with respect, preserving the resident's dignity, and providing for the resident's individual needs and preferences in a professional manner; (2) demonstrating exceptional skill in responding to residents' physical and emotional needs; (3) demonstrating exceptional skill in communicating with family members and in responding to their requests; and (4) serving as a model caregiver for his or her peers, readily assisting other GNAs as needed, and interacting positively with other staff members.

Concerns raised at Family Council meetings often have involved shortcomings in communication with nursing staff, particularly ensuring that a family member's messages are conveyed from one shift to the next. These concerns have involved basic care (e.g., insertion of hearing aids, proper cleaning of teeth, lost laundry); lack of stimulating activities to substitute for TV watching; and lack of prompt communication about changes in medications and failure to identify serious medical problems promptly. On the other hand, many Family Council members have reported very positive experiences with the quality of care, making it clear that concerns vary by unit, shift, and caregivers.

To improve staff-family communication, the Family Council has suggested a number of ideas, such as a communications notebook for each unit to record family member requests and whiteboards in residents' rooms for messages to staff. A Hebrew Home vice president suggested using laptops on each unit loaded with customer service software designed to direct requests to appropriate departments and staff. This automated system would enable the unit managers and others to track requests, complaints, and unit and facility-wide trends. It would also make staff more accountable for responding to family requests and ensure that such communications are shared from shift to shift and weekday to weekend. We hope to work with the Hebrew Home in the coming year to develop better communication vehicles to ensure that family member concerns, feedback, and requests are better documented and appropriately addressed.

The Family Council has also recommended a number of improvements to the quarterly care plan meetings. These recommendations include extending the meeting time to allow for more questions and information exchange, holding meetings in spaces large enough to accommodate all participants (a problem in the Wasserman building), and ensuring attendance by key staff. Some Family Council members have successfully requested and obtained copies of written care plans, which gives them a record of the specifics of a resident's care. Generally, however, the family is not provided any written record about the care plan or decisions made at the meeting. During the coming year, the Family Council will work with senior leadership to make improvements to these meetings, as they are a critical tool for family members to learn about residents' care and raise questions and concerns directly with unit staff.

The Family Council's Communication Subcommittee also worked with the Hebrew Home Public Relations Office on *Your Guide for Residents and Families of the Hebrew Home of Greater Washington, a Table-Top Concierge*, which provides answers to common questions about health services and living at the Hebrew Home. This updated guide, expected to be released later this year, will include answers to questions the Family Council submitted as well as provide key staff contact information.

In response to a request of the Family Council, Director of Social Work Alicia Flores offered an after-work caregivers support group, in addition to her existing Friday midday groups. After several months, the evening session was discontinued due to a lack of

participation; however, the Family Council greatly appreciated her willingness to offer the evening program.

4. Providing Feedback and Recommendations to Help Improve Dining Services

Improving the quality of residents' dining services was a Family Council priority during our first year. In November, the Council circulated a Dining Services Questionnaire to members to solicit feedback and recommendations for improvements. The results were tabulated, summarized, and shared with the Hebrew Home's dining services leaders, opening a dialogue that included several presentations, meetings, and a tour of the Wasserman kitchen. The Family Council Dining Services Subcommittee now has a close working relationship with Dining Services General Manager Dave Figel, Clinical Nutrition Manager Rhonda Brandes, Wasserman Food Manager David Parker, Smith-Kogod Food Manager Lynford Wilson, and Hebrew Home Executive Chef Graham Collette.

The Family Council appreciates the improvements that the Food and Nutrition Department has introduced over the past year and is excited about the new initiatives that are now being piloted. For example, efforts are underway to pilot resident choice in selections at every meal, an important element of resident-centered care. The department will pilot various ways to implement resident choice since many residents are currently unaware of daily options or are conditioned simply to accept whatever meal is placed in front of them. In addition, the Food and Nutrition Department has made many menu changes and introduced festive meal alternatives such as "happy hours" and pizza and ice cream socials to enhance the dining experience for residents. The Family Council supports these initiatives.

The Food and Nutrition Department has responded very positively to Family Council feedback and suggestions. They clearly view "customer/resident service" to be a number one priority. The Family Council also recognizes the important role that GNAs play in contributing to the ambiance and quality of service during mealtime. Mealtimes can provide a wonderful opportunity for GNAs to socialize with residents, assist them in making appropriate menu selections, monitor whether residents are enjoying their meal, and suggest alternatives if needed. We look forward to working with the Nursing Department to encourage GNAs to play a greater role in enhancing residents' dining experience.

5. Inviting Local Schools and Organizations to Entertain at the Hebrew Home

From the outset, the Family Council identified increasing entertainment and stimulation for residents as a high priority. Members observed that too many residents seemed to spend too much time sitting or sleeping in front of TVs. One suggestion was to encourage GNAs to view communication and socialization with residents as a primary part of their job. Hebrew Home leadership supports this view as part of its "drive to

excellence” initiative to improve overall quality of care and make the Hebrew Home more resident-centered.

Activities Subcommittee Co-Chairs, with the support of Patty Hagen, Recreational Therapy Director, developed a mailing list and sent more than 125 letters in April 2011 to public and private schools, synagogues, and music and dance programs inviting them to “Bring Your Talent” to the Hebrew Home. We plan to follow up on this effort this coming year to bring more community-based entertainment to the Hebrew Home.

6. Providing Educational Programs for Family Members

Educating family members about Hebrew Home programs and policies has been another top priority of the Family Council. Senior staff has been invited to brief Family Council members on a number of important topics. Barbara Hirsch provided a detailed presentation on the Hebrew Home’s Federal/State 2010 licensing survey results. In addition, Eileen Bennett, Director of the Montgomery County Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, and Alicia Flores, Director of Social Work, briefed the Council on the Federal MDS 3.0 Survey of Nursing Facilities. Members received handouts and background documents, including copies of the Hebrew Home’s licensing survey results. John Doyle, Account Manager for Evercare, provided an overview of this Medicare Advantage health insurance plan, which is designed for nursing home residents. Other briefings included a presentation by Rabbi Michaels and Arnie Hammer about the Hebrew Home’s Ethics Committee and, as described in section 4 above, briefings by the Food and Nutrition Department. Tom Keefe, VP for Human Resources, is scheduled to speak at the June 2011 Annual Meeting. Invitations have been extended to Neal White, the new Administrator, and Linda Rader, Director of Nursing, to meet with the Family Council later this year.

The Education Subcommittee planned two stand-alone educational programs this year. *Elder Law and Moving to Medicaid* was held on May 22 and was very well attended. Speakers included Louis Jay Ulman, Senior Principal, Offit, Kurman, Attorneys at Law, and Deborah Carter, Supervisor, Medical Assistance Long Term Care Unit, Montgomery County Dept. of Health and Human Services. A second program on palliative and hospice care was postponed to await completion of the Hebrew Home’s palliative care program. We look forward to offering additional educational programs in the coming year.

Conclusion

The Family Council has set the stage for ongoing contributions by family members to the quality of care at the Hebrew Home. In the coming year, the Family Council plans to:

- Increase membership by expanding distribution of the Family Council brochure and holding weekend membership drives

- Continue meeting with Hebrew Home senior leadership, including Pat Carter, Senior VP for Operations; Neal White, Administrator; Linda Rader, Director of Nursing; and James E. Lett, Medical Director
- Work with Hebrew Home leadership to develop better communication vehicles to ensure that family members' concerns, feedback, and requests are documented and addressed
- Work with Hebrew Home leadership to make improvements to the quarterly care plan meetings as a critical tool for quality care decision making, effective family communication, and staff accountability
- Continue our dialogue with the Food and Nutrition Department and support its "customer/resident service" innovations
- Continue to work with the Recreational Therapy Department to bring more community music, dance, and other entertainment to the Hebrew Home
- Offer additional educational programs, including a program about the Hebrew Home's palliative care program as well as hospice care.

In conclusion, the Family Council looks forward to working with the Hebrew Home senior leadership and staff in their efforts to provide the best possible resident-centered care for all Hebrew Home residents.

Prepared by Toby Levin and Carolyn Levine, Family Council Co-Chairs