

Life in a Nursing Home During the COVID-19 Pandemic

by Judith Mangum

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The lives of all have changed but none as much as those living in nursing homes and assisted living facilities. We all woke up one day and learned that some pandemic would change life as we knew it.

We were asked to travel only on our floor and visit from the hall only. I found this hard to do. I love to talk but who wants to hear your entire conversation? No one could be in the hall without a mask on was next. Who am I? - a person robbing a bank? These were uncomfortable, hot, made you look like a ducks bill and you cannot breath out of them. Now that is a real reason to wear one. Truly, they were to protect others from any germs we might have pertaining to the COVID-19. To be told later we should wear them when someone comes into the room was almost too much. After all, haven't we gone by these rules long enough. NO. Only the beginning.

Activities were marked CANCELLED. Our Activities Dept played BINGO in the halls which was a welcome change from TV. (We residents sat in our doorways.) How many times can you watch bonanza or Andy Griffith without reruns. Besides they get old quickly. They gave hot chocolate to us, puffed corn and other food items. There were also activities which had been modified for use in the hall. We are at the mercy of this department, but they do try.

In the past this facility took us for scenic rides around the community but that changed when we were asked to stay home. We did. Changes again!!! We were told to staying our rooms and go no further than our food. I am a social person, so I really felt closed off not only from those in this place, I could no longer have visits from family or friends. For a little while we could have a visitor, only one, for a 20-minute visit outside under the canopy. If this person was late the visiting time changed. If they were 5 minutes late, they lost that amount of visiting. If it was cold or weather not permitting these visits were not allowed and were to be rescheduled. Suddenly no more visits. Stay inside stay in our rooms.

Foods we had on a regular basis were not available or dietary had to make changes because of all shortages of food in the nation. No hot dogs and buns but always the vegetable you hated a lot! No eggs for a bit so when I got a fried egg I thought I was still sleeping. It tasted better than I ever remembered.

I talked of staying in our rooms, but I failed to mention that no shopping is allowed. Families or staff will shop for us but there is something wrong here. No interactions with those lovely shopping carts. You may think that is good, but I really miss those bumps from them by another shopper that was in a hurry. "I'm sorry my chair got in your way. I'll try to do better." I miss them!!!!

I was to have cataract surgery but wasn't able to due to the dreaded pandemic and still haven't. When?? I don't know. If for some reason a resident had to venture out, upon returning they faced quarantine for 14 days. When I was having problems medically and needed to see a Dr, suddenly I was introduced to a video Dr visit! What a treat. You talk to them on a phone answering questions. Then the rash, ear or anything was viewed over this same phone and treatment as well as diagnosis made and orders given. Very odd and very not good!!! No way to treat but what could be done...the pandemic you know.

So now I go to sleep after midnight with the door open. When I wake up about three am my door is closed. I asked why it was shut and was told because State said so. Now it wasn't enough to have my mental problems, now I was forced to somehow deal with my claustrophobia. Not only were the blinds closed but also the door closed at all time. I am still dealing with this one. I have a meltdown from time to time and sometimes those blinds are left open til I go to sleep.

The staff has changed quite a bit. Anger is ever present, attitudes have changed, more call ins, aides quit. Some that should have been let go are still here. Not good care. We are all affected by this pandemic!! When the ADON quits suddenly and a few days later the DON leaves with no warning, something is definitely wrong. When will this all stop? There is not enough staff to care for us. I was not changed one day from 2 pm to 11 pm. The temporary staff don't always wear masks or gloves. I don't want them to touch me but don't always have a choice. It is hard to hear that staff have COVID and have infected their loved ones.

We are tired physically but also mentally....be it staff or resident. It doesn't matter. We are tired! When will this all change?

Lastly let me tell you what happens if you test positive for the covid-19. You are rushed to the red hall where it is sealed off from entry inside the building. They are taken out the side door, around the side and enter this strange room where you have the same aides and nurse's day after day unless off. The room you came from is packed up, stored in the dining room with the exception of the essentials. You have items that staff feels necessary not necessarily what you want.

With all the cleaning, bleach and what seems nonstop use of hand sanitizers, the pandemic is taking over. Staff with COVID-19...16, residents with COVID-19...36, residents in the yellow zone, which is the rest of us 30. Deaths... 4. All this because a country was able to spread a virus all over the world. A vaccine is almost here. Do we take it hoping it works, and if it does, what can happen to us in future years because we took the shot?

Life is different and so difficult but, in the end,, if you think about it, it won't last forever. Pandemic...what are you...when will you stop tormenting us? Only God knows.

God bless...Judith.