Ensuring That Your Loved Ones Are Embraced and Celebrated for Who They Are

Rajeev Kumar, MD, CMD, co-chair of AMDA’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Workgroup, talks about DEI and what it means to residents, families, and others.

You’ve likely heard about diversity, equity, and inclusion. But do you know what these terms mean and what they mean for your loved one in a long-term care facility?

Diversity is all about recognizing, respecting, and valuing differences based on ethnicity, gender, age, race, religion, disability, and sexual orientation. Equity is about justice and fairness for everyone irrespective of such differences. Inclusion is the practice of valuing and respecting all people in a group regardless of difference and creating an environment that allows people to feel comfortable being who they are. The three concepts work closely together to create a safe and healthy society, and it is no different in long-term care.

It is vitally important that your loved ones feel safe and respected in long-term care settings. They should be able to celebrate who they are without any fear of being disrespected or discriminated against because of their religious beliefs, sexual orientation, or ethnic background. At the same time, it is important for your loved ones to respect others’ differences as well.

How do you know if a facility truly embraces DEI? There are a few steps you can take when looking for a facility for your loved one or when determining if their current facility embraces DEI:

• Do a little detective work. Visit the facility’s website. Does it address DEI anywhere? Do the photos portray a variety of people, or does everyone look alike? Read reviews to see what people are saying. How is DEI addressed in the organization’s policies and procedures? Does the facility have a zero-tolerance policy for hate speech and disrespectful behavior?

• Visit the facility. Do you see people of various ethnicities, races, and backgrounds among the staff and residents? Is there diversity among the staff at different levels of the organization?

• Ask questions. Do they offer a variety of food, events, and activities that appeal to different ethnic groups? Do they enable religious celebrations for a variety of faiths? Do they have activities and programs that promote diversity? Do they have Pride events? Do the residents feel free to display items related to their faith or heritage and dress according to their wishes? Is everyone — the residents, staff, and visitors — treated with respect in the community? Do the team leaders treat frontline workers with the same courtesy that they offer the physicians and other practitioners?

If you think that your loved one is being treated differently or unfairly because of who they are, it is important to raise the issue with the administrator or other team leader right away. Know that it is never acceptable for a staff member or resident to use racial slurs or hate speech under any circumstances.

It is important to realize that everyone has biases — they are a part of human nature. However, it also is essential for everyone to recognize these biases and work to overcome them. Sometimes we’re not even aware of our biases. These are called unconscious or implicit biases, and they generally involve formation of social stereotypes based on differences among us. For example, one may be more comfortable requesting a caregiver for a loved one who is of the same ethnic group, or one may suspect socioeconomically underprivileged people of criminal intent without even realizing it.

Once we are aware of our unconscious biases, it is important to consider where they come from and how they impact us. Then we can start to consciously and conscientiously change our behaviors.

DEI isn’t just a trendy idea. It’s an essential part of any organization or community and our society at large. Everyone deserves to be treated with respect and kindness and empowered to celebrate what makes them unique.

Questions to Ask Your Practitioner

• How do I choose a facility that will be a good fit for my loved one’s [ethnic, racial, sexual] identity?

• How do I make sure my loved one will be accepted?

• What should I do if I know or suspect that the staff has biases against my loved one?

• How do I help staff understand what my loved one’s [ethnicity, background, faith] identity means to them?

What You Can Do

• Work with staff to make sure that your loved one can celebrate religious holidays and other special events that are meaningful to them.

• Work with the activities director to develop a program to celebrate your loved one’s unique identity.

For More Information


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