



MINIWAKAN WAONSPEKIYE NEWS

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TRIBAL NURSING HOME: A MODEL

Perceptions of Turtle Mountain elders and Tribal Members

Study Conducted June 2002

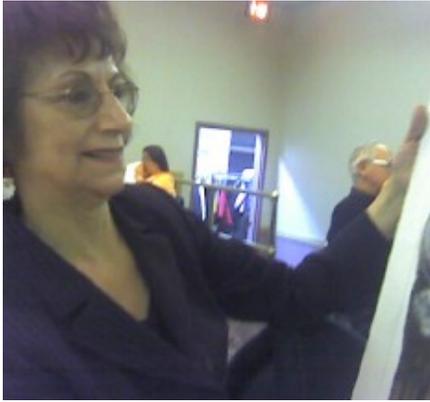
Why all of the fuss about a nursing home on the reservation?

An article by Dr. Carol Davis

“I would have appreciated having a tribal nursing home here on the reservation as an option for Francis.” Those words were spoken by Zelma Peltier, tribal elder, who was referring to her husband in a recent interview. Because the reservation does not have a nursing home, she was forced to find care for him off of the reservation. In American Indian Country, rarely will you find a nursing home located on a reservation. There are a variety of reasons, but the main reason is financial. The tribes don’t have resources to build a facility or staff and operate it once it is built. But that doesn’t diminish the desire on the part of Indian people to have a facility at home.

Tribal members don’t like to place their family members in nursing homes, especially if they are off the reservation. Zelma knows first hand the struggles a family endures when a health condition becomes severe and a loved one cannot be cared for in the home. Her husband, Francis, suffered a massive stroke at the age of 56 “...that left him in a locked-brain condition, as the doctor explained it,” she said. When it became evident that Francis was not going to get better in the hospital, the doctors recommended that he be transferred to a nursing home where he could receive 24-hour care. “It was a difficult situation to face,” said Zelma. But she gathered her strength and set out to seek the best residence she could find.

After looking near and far from the reservation, Zelma chose a residence at Westhope, North Dakota, sixty-five miles from her home. As she spoke of the home, she remembered with fondness how caring they were and the many acts of kindness they showed her husband. But this good care did not come cheap. Zelma depleted her savings as she met the \$2500 per month costs—savings that they had intended to use as their nest egg when they retired. Her husband was in the care of the nursing home for 32 months before he died.



Above: Dr. Davis
ponders survey data

It is incidents such as those Zelma experienced that have caused constant promises by the reservation leadership to establish a nursing home on the reservation. At Turtle Mountain, the politicians are once more assuring the tribal members that it will happen in the next couple of years.

In 2002 word came to the reservation that \$1 million was granted to the tribe to begin the process of establishing a nursing home on the reservation. Turtle Mountain Community College decided to do their part by conducting a study that involved tribal members on the Turtle Mountain Reservation who addressed their perceptions of what a nursing home on the reservation should be. The study was conducted by Turtle Mountain Community College staff members who received a research capacity-building grant from the Indian Health Service. The results have been shared with that agency and two tribal councils since that time.

Why is a nursing home needed on the reservation?

Over the years on the Turtle Mountain Reservation, there must have been ten resolutions adopted by the tribal government declaring that a nursing home would be built. On several occasions, drawings were even shared through the local newspapers that provided a rendering of the building. There was always a desire to have a facility that made residents feel at home. But each time, the tribal government found that passing a motion was the easy part. It was difficult to address all of the issues that good planning required.

Without a doubt, there is a desire to serve the needs of the tribal members whose activities of daily living skills (ADLS) show that they need assistance with the most basic functions of living such as dressing, eating, bathing, getting in and out of bed, walking and using the toilet. The majority of those who have needs are elderly, but other tribal members who are born with disabilities, or who become disabled, are also candidates for nursing home services.

The term "nursing home" means a facility licensed by the state, or a nursing care facility operated by a health agency such as the Indian Health Service. These are 24-hour residential long-term care facilities.

Traditionally, the American Indian people prefer to care for the elderly at home. This tradition has been kept in many instances. However, economic factors have caused this to change for some. When young tribal members leave the reservations to seek employment, or when the potential care

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giver has a job, this leaves no one at home to care for the disabled or elders. Thus, it becomes necessary to find ways to provide for their care. When tribal members are sent off of the reservation, some families do not have the means or funds for traveling great distances to cities to visit their family members.

Distance was a factor for Zelma, who would have preferred to have her husband on the reservation near her. "I spent every week-end with him," she said. She was grateful that the nursing home let her sleep in the activity room on a couch and provided her with free meals. She explained that she drove up every Friday night and returned home Sunday evening to the reservation and her job as a high school teacher.

To date, there are only 13 or 14 American Indian-owned nursing homes in the United States and only a very few of these care for Native Americans only. The need for tribal nursing home care will increase as the population increases. According to the United States Department of Commerce, and the Bureau of Census, the number of American Indians, Eskimos, and Aleuts over 65 increased from 74,919 in 1980 to 114,453 in 1990, an increase of 53%.

At the time of the Turtle Mountain study in 2002, the Bureau of Indian Affairs reported 592 tribal members who were over the age of 65 living on or immediately adjacent to the reservation. The reservation lacked nursing home or assisted living facilities to accommodate those who needed the service or those who would have a need in the immediate future. Realizing this, the tribal council passed a resolution and began an initiative called "Bring Our Elders Home" to respond to this service void. The College joined the momentum and launched "A Nursing Home Study" to help determine what the tribal membership wanted a nursing home to provide.

How was the nursing home study designed?

The study included researchers who used multiple survey techniques to gather information from the tribal membership representing a wide age range of 18 years and older. The researchers trained 26 students who collected information from the elders. The researchers collected the other data. In this study, perception data was obtained under four conditions:

- Personal interviews of elders representing the age group 55 and older.
- Focus group interviews of tribal members representing the age group of 35-54 years of age.
- Written survey of college students and staff representing the age group of 18-34 years.
- Interviews at two tribally-operated nursing homes.

The informants included 34 elders, 15 tribal members who participated in a focus group, 94 TMCC students, and 4 nursing home administrators.

What did the study reveal?

The results were reported in five segments: 1) administrative, 2) Architectural, 3) social, 4) cultural, and 5) spiritual-religious aspects of a nursing home.

Administrative:

When Zelma was asked about administration, she related, “No matter who offers nursing home services, it is important to treat the patients with dignity. Find the best people to work in the facility.” She remembered with fondness one weekend when Westhope High School had a football game and after the game, a young man came to volunteer for the night. She found out that he was one of the football players. She also said it was important for the facility to be clean and not smell bad.

“No matter who offers nursing home services, it is important to treat the patients with dignity.”

Here is what the research participants said about tribal nursing home administration:

- There should be 24-hour care
- Hire medical staff including an EMT
- Include a special area for Alzheimer’s and terminal patients
- Health care and living should be in same facility
- Treat residents with dignity
- Allow residents to make decisions for themselves
- Allow family to help plan the care
- Physical therapy services should be available
- There should be an area for medical services so elders don’t have to sit in a clinic
- Provide transportation
- Hire friendly staff with good bed-side manners
- Provide hearing officers for grievances
- Maintain a family atmosphere by staff
- Hire Qualified staff, not just people who want a job
- Have lots of volunteers and caring people
- Get family members to volunteer at facility
- Make sure the home is clean and well kept
- The biggest advantage is that we would be at “Home”
- Close to hospital
- Hire our own people
- Assure stability of the facility
- Keep tribal politics out of the facility
- Fully accredited
- Don’t mismanage the funds

“Hire qualified staff [at a nursing home], not just people who want a job.”

Architectural:

When asked about the nursing home facility at Westhope, Zelma described Francis’ room as a typical nursing home room with two patients. He had enough room for four chairs around his bed to accommodate visitors and she brought him a small television and tape recorder that was placed on a small table. He had a bulletin board near his bed and she changed pictures

and decorations on the board often. At Christmas, she brought him a table-top Christmas tree. “Francis was an orphan and often told me when he was a little boy he wished for a toy train. I found a Christmas ornament train and brought it for his tree. I think I saw him smile when I showed it to him,” said Zelma. She added, “He smiled and he cried once in a while.”

Here is what the research participants said they would like to see in a tribal nursing home facility:

- Spacious private rooms
- Bedroom and separate living area
- Kitchenettes
- Large enough room where husbands and wives can share the same living quarters. Keep resident with mate
- Rooms should not be so hospital-like
- Allow residents to bring personal items from home such as crucifixes, holy pictures, prayer books, personal items, plants, pictures, rosary, recliner
- Provide personal refrigerator
- Television
- Computer and accessories
- Allow patients to bring their bed from home
- Room at facility where guests can stay overnight
- Family week-ends when out-of-town family can stay over
- Allow family to stay with resident sometimes
- A place to pray
- A place to exercise, lift weights
- Swimming pool for therapy
- Hot tub and sauna for diabetics and people with medical needs
- Beauty shop
- Garden plots
- Picnic area
- Kitchen where family can come and prepare a meal for a whole family
- Commons where people can mingle
- Coffee shop
- Gift shop
- Kitchen where church groups can come to cook and serve traditional meals
- Create an atmosphere that makes people want to live

“Allow residents to bring personal items from home [to tribal nursing home facilities].”

“Making a family member comfortable and letting him know you care is important.”

Social:

When Zelma was asked about the social activities at the nursing home, she explained that Francis appeared unconscious and could not participate as the others did. However, he was included. “They had lots of activities,” she said. “They played bingo, did crafts, and they had special events like Christmas parties. It was not uncommon for musicians to come to the home to entertain. “Making a family member comfortable and letting him know you care is important,” she said.

Here is what the researchers said they desired to fulfill the social environment at a reservation nursing home.

- Create a strong sense of community
- Allow residents to visit each other
- Video check-out, bingo, quilting, crafts, field trips, theater quality movies shown each week
- Take residents shopping, church, community activities, casino
- Allow residents to cook once in a while
- Celebrate birthdays, holidays, special occasions
- Worship together
- Bring in school children to perform or be with residents
- Bring in traditional dancers
- Help children learn respect for our elders and culture
- Bring TMCC art students to paint murals
- Allow residents to teach children about culture and wisdom so they will feel useful

Culture:

“Music was important to Francis. He especially loved country music. I brought him tapes and the staff played them for him. They also brought him country tapes as gifts.” She added that on the reservation a drum group would be appropriate for many.

Here is what the research participants said about culture:

- Having our own people working in the nursing home would help make it comfortable
- Allow nursing home residents to share what their cultural knowledge
- Allow residents to provide storytelling
- Residents should be able to go to Native American Week activities and powwows
- Residents should be allowed to go to ceremonies
- Bring drum groups to the residence
- Maybe activities with the fiddle would be good, too
- Décor should be earthy

- Decorate with Native American symbols and pictures of legends
- Art students should paint murals

Spiritual/Religious:

Zelma talked about the importance of spirituality for the patient as well as the family. “No matter which denomination or if the patient practices traditional ways, spirituality gives everyone hope and the will to go on.”

Here is what the research participants said about spirituality/religion:

- Have mass said at the residence
- Have a place to pray
- Church services
- Visits from the Clergy
- Respect for all religions
- Spiritual activities should be residents choice

What did we learn from Zelma’s experience and the study?

When asked her opinion about having a nursing home on the reservation, Zelma said, “Maintaining contact with your loved one confined in a nursing home is important. Not everyone can afford to pay the high costs I paid. Not everyone can afford to travel every week-end, especially at today’s gas prices. A residence on the reservation is needed in order to give every tribal member the care they deserve if nursing home care is required.”

Zelma’s testimony brings reality to the necessity to address nursing home care on the Turtle Mountain Reservation. The study conducted by the college through multiple interview and survey methods allowed tribal members from three selected age groups to offer their perceptions about the administrative, architectural, social, cultural, and spiritual/religious aspects of a tribally controlled and managed, on-reservation nursing home. The results indicate that tribal members desire a nursing home on the reservation that is stable and allows residents their dignity, offers full accommodations for residents and their families, allows socializing and interaction, includes cultural aspects and traditional activities, and affords opportunities for worship and practice of ceremonies depending on the beliefs of the individual.

“Maintaining contact with your loved one confined in a nursing home is important.”

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WORKSHOPS SCHEDULED FOR JUNE 2006 ON THE SPIRIT LAKE AND TURTLE MOUNTAIN RESERVATIONS

Caring for Our People Training – for staff serving tribal members with disabilities

Special Education is the second workshop of the COPT series. This two-day workshop is focused on how parents and school staff can work together to help children succeed. It covers topics such as changes in the classroom to reduce learning and behavior problems, Individual Education Plans, personal and social issues for school age children with disabilities, adolescent identity and disability, substance abuse by students with disabilities, and preventative health.

Disability Access – for those with disabilities and their family members

Family Life and Disability is the second workshop of the Disability Access series. This two day workshop covers how disability affects the family during early childhood, the school years, youth and adulthood. We briefly discuss personal care for people with severe disabilities, prevention of infection and injury, helping children adjust to school, accepting your child with a disability moving out on his or her own. We also discuss social issues that affect people with disabilities and their families – drugs, dating, drinking, divorce and dying. As in all of our workshops, *Family Life and Disability* focuses information to make life better for tribal members with disabilities.

CONTACT Derrick Dauphinais (701) 351-2667 Spirit Lake OR Willie Davis (701) 477-0322 Turtle Mountain to schedule one of these workshops. We are willing to travel to any reservation in the U.S. but we give priority to the Great Plains states and our funding is, of course, limited, so call soon!

Other workshops now available ...

CARING FOR OUR PEOPLE TRAINING FOR STAFF SERVING TRIBAL MEMBERS WITH DISABILITIES The Introduction to Disability & Culture is recommended as the first workshop of the Caring for Our People series. This two-day workshop focuses on information on disabilities of all types, coping strategies, disability services, cultural issues, legal rights, financial resources, and service barriers that one may encounter in a tribal community. Whether one is new to the disability field or an experienced staff member, this workshop will provide you information and assistance in serving tribal members with disabilities. It is also an opportunity to share your experiences and learn from other staff, people with disabilities and their families.

DISABILITY ACCESS: EMPOWERING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES & THEIR FAMILIES Know what your rights are and make sure you get the services you need. This workshop will focus on the services available to people with disabilities, their rights and finding just about any information you will ever need from the phone number to the tribal vocational rehabilitation office to a sample letter to the school asking for a change in your child's educational plan. The workshop takes place in a computer lab, using the Disability Access CD-ROM, which we will teach you to use and give you for free, thanks to funding from a grant from the Department of Education.

To find more information on these workshops, or any other service that Spirit Lake Consulting provides, please visit our website at www.spiritlakeconsulting.com Our website includes workshop descriptions, our course modules, a Commons Area that consists of monthly newsletters, a community bulletin board, and virtual field trips, as well as a Virtual Library, which includes various information regarding specific disabilities. Discover this and more at our website ...