THE IMPORTANCE OF GERONTOLOGICAL SOCIAL WORK
IN DAY CARE CENTERS FOR THE ELDERLY
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Abstract: through activities organized in day centers it is attempted to reconnect elderly, who due to age, retirement, illness, many problems encountered along life tend to disrupt relations with the community, peers and to lose social functioning.

Key words: day centres, deinstitutionalization, social counseling.

Day care center is a socio-medical institution with legal personality, subordinated to the Department of community development and support, Adult Protection Service. Day centers for the elderly are social care institutions, with precise status and operating rules, having to meet certain collective needs. Day centers for the elderly are a form of prevention of institutionalization. The main objective is to support the elderly persons that due to reasons of an economic, physical, mental or social nature are unable to provide for their social needs, to develop their own capacities and skills for social integration. (Miftode Vasile, 1999)

In other words, day centers are an alternative to the loneliness of the elderly persons. This form of social assistance aims to prevent addiction -if possible- and is aimed at improving the living conditions of older persons. This form of social protection provides the possibility of aged to spend their free time in a pleasant way, and on the other hand, gives safety for family (dependents) through surveillance of the elderly. Benefiting from gerontological social welfare in day centers:

- old-age pensioners - regardless of nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, income;
- the elderly person who has no family;
- elder who encounters difficulties in the family;
- retired who don't realize their own income or they are not sufficient to ensure the necessary care;
- persons that can no longer carry on physical work in the household;
- persons that are unable to ensure socio-medical needs from multiple causes;
- retired on medical grounds.

In general, groups of beneficiaries of these services are as follows:
- immobilized or hard to mobilize elderly;
- elderly people showing different illnesses and are being treated and monitored;
- mobilizing senior citizens with different handicaps more "light".

The decision to frequent these day centers belongs to the elderly and eventually to his family. The elder is a mature, responsible person, who shall have the right to decide what he wants. These day care centers are living proof of the changes in the social sphere, after 1990 onwards. The changes relate to the quality of services and material facilities existing in the centers. From the point of view of the quality of services, prevails the action of knowing the status and conditions of older people; recognition of their special needs -if there are any – and solving the multiple problems of this category of persons. And, in the second point, namely that of the facilities, we can say that these differ according to the management of each Direction of Community Assistance and the support received from local councils. The activities in the Day Center are made especially for the elderly and seek comprehensive care, treatment and changing the client, with the purpose to improve the quality of life, which is the central value of social assistance. Studies have shown that the elderly who have less vitality, activity and are isolated, die faster than people the same age who socialize and are active.

In general, in day centers they are trying to create a pleasant atmosphere, even familiar, where the elder feels good, important and satisfied with how he is treated. Even the minutest things/gestures are taken into account, which emphasizes the increase of self-esteem. A very important aspect is the respect for privacy of aged, so toilets are separated by partition walls, clothes are kept in the best conditions, while attending the Center. Of particular importance is considered compliance with social and medical ethics, increasing the level of communication between involved specialists and the client/patient. Social assistance is considered an art because it implies from the part of the practitioner a series of outstanding personal qualities and skills which need to be adapted to the problems of elderly clients, in order to be able to better understand them and to help them help themselves.

For the results of social assistance to be as expected, there must emphasize the unique value of each person, which implies unconditional respect towards the
elderly person and treat them with much attention. However, staff involved in working with the elderly often wonders why many sexagenarians consider themselves to be insulted when they are called elderly or old at the time of the occurrence of retirement. There are several explanations, such as the fact that the financial situation of the aged person does not create a state "to agree", that in general old age is likened to a disease, loneliness, stigma, isolation; moreover, the decrease of income which can lead to the phenomenon of frustration and revolts, considering the value of the pension as a lack of respect for the years of work coming from the State.

So, problems and frustrations accumulated induce this state of agitation and discontent that is felt by the people around, and therefore services addressed to seniors must take into account these issues, preventing unpleasant situations and respecting the dignity of the person, regardless of age. (Marshall, 1993)

Modern social assistance starts from the needs of the people, promoting education for help – to help each other – and for a better understanding of the fellows who are in suffering, in the spirit of human solidarity. Assistance in day care centers may be defined as the range of services and facilities intended to meet the problems of the elderly. This kind of assistance helps the elderly to be integrated into their community, which is a vital thing for them, giving much needed moral support. (Mănoiu, Epureanu, 1996)

The organization of gerontological support services in day centers differs from country to country, but what is common to all is the recognition of the universal needs of elderly persons.

These needs are:

- the need for emotional support and to find an answer to personal problems;
- the need to be informed concerning the availability of a service, who it belongs to, in what it consists, who provides it, what are the criteria that a person must meet in order to be able to benefit from that service, what are the criteria for the selection of persons who may benefit from it, etc.
- the need for some personal care.

Care is a pivot value in the field of gerontologic social assistance, concern for the benefit of the elderly customer and to satisfy his needs. Services of day care centers take into account the interests and needs of their clients and through specialized services and professionals involved, it is tried to solve the worries and to satisfy the needs. Treatment is another main purpose being pursued through social assistance in day centers for the elderly – tributary to medical paradigm from where it is loaned - targeting appropriate techniques for social function to be restored. The final goal will be to determine clients to help themselves. (Bogdan, 1992)
Change and reform are essential elements of social assistance and they aim the permanent struggle to improve life conditions. Social assistance in day centers targets also social education. It's about the efforts directed to change the attitudes of disadvantaged categories - which are generally the social assistance customers - on one hand and the public opinion against the most vulnerable members, on the other hand. Services that the elderly can benefit for in day care centers for the elderly are social welfare services which involve tracing the evolution of the aged and his family by the social worker who tries to find, together with the beneficiaries, the most suitable solutions to the existing problems of the elderly.

Beneficiaries are therefore informed in relation to services that they may benefit from the authorities of the State or of other non-governmental organizations, are helped to draw up papers for obtaining social help, emergency aid, jobs, etc. In times of major crisis elders can receive emergency aid consisting in payment of electric current bill, the utility expenses, rent, tax as well as buying clothing or drugs. Social counseling considers mediating relations of aged with his family, preventing abuse and neglect, conflict situations arising from various social problems; measures to maintain the elderly in difficulty in family and in community; support and assistance for the family. Prevention of social exclusion through social reactivation that aims at finding the means to put to advantage the old person's experience in order to diminish the sense of marginalization and social isolation to prevent decompensation related to advancing in age and maintaining an optimal function.

- Individual or group counseling. The elderly are advised with regard to relations with the family and the couple, in cases of physical and emotional abuse, but also in matters of conduct disorder and adjustment difficulties, moral support in the event of widowhood, death of child, of close ones friends or friends;
- Legal advice – it offers the possibility of being informed of his rights and obligations in his situation: inheritance, loss of house, domestic violence, abuse, etc. Informing about legal field aims to prevent stripping the elderly of movables and, specially, immovable assets, that would send the elder in a healthcare institution.
- primary medical care - medical consultations provided by the doctor of the day care center, advices and prescriptions for medical treatment; distribution of free drugs under medical prescriptions - within the limits of existing stock – and if in the center there is not the necessary medication then the elderly are supported in obtaining
them; carrying out medical treatments by nurses; monitoring of patients and informing them in connection with health problems that they encounter. Within the medical counseling educational activities for health take place, aimed at the prevention of obesity, diabetes, sedentary, etc.

- Canteen services - can benefit of canteen services all the elderly enrolled in day care units for the elderly who manifested their desire to that effect and are justified by the law in force. The food is prepared at the municipal social canteen and brought in special containers at the day care centers. This meal cost 30% of the income of the pensioner -according to the legislation in force Law 208/1997. Social canteens are units of public social welfare and work under the control of local councils and operate under the provisions of Law 208/1997. (Crăciun, Abraham, P., 2000) Can benefit from canteen services people who are retired and people who reached the age of retirement and are socially isolated; they do not have legal supporters; who are deprived of incomes; and chronically ill people. These social aid canteens provide appropriate services for food preparation, daily, accordingly to food allowance within the limits prescribed by the regulations; provide, for a fee, from the canteen with basic products.

As a conclusion in evaluating this type of service, elders are inclined to some major changes when it comes to the environment and their house. The efficiency of these services is very high because the socialization is at the base of the process of aging and ratiocinates the availability or unavailability of the elderly to the changes. Beneficial are the effects of these services as well as those at home.

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