

Meeting Advancing Excellence Goals with The Eden Alternative *Decrease Symptoms of Pain*

By Denise Hyde

Description & rationale: Pain is an unpleasant experience for anyone, but is particularly miserable for Elders in nursing homes. Sometimes nursing home residents, especially those with cognitive challenges, don't know how to express their pain.

Nursing home staff is sometimes unaware of medications and other interventions that will alleviate the pain. Working on this goal will help nursing home staff identify pain symptoms and will give staff the skills to effectively treat pain. The result will make residents more comfortable and enhance their quality of life.



How The Eden Alternative strengthens this goal: An Elder whose pain is not being recognized and addressed is experiencing diminished well-being. It takes close, caring relationships to recognize pain when it occurs and identify effective interventions that relieve the pain.

- **Companionship (Principle Three) is a key ingredient to recognizing and addressing an Elder's pain.** Companionship grows out of close and continuing contact between care partners, human and animal. This can only develop in an organization that has de-emphasized the need to keep a tight, time-driven schedule and has instead created a rhythm of daily life that is much more relaxed, driven by the Elders needs (Principle Eight). Through companionship, the Elder's identity is strengthened. Care partners of Elders who live with dementia have developed a unique set of skills to observe and read body language to sense when pain is an issue. This is a gift they receive from the Elders, when they are able to become well-known to one another.
- **The experience of pain is enhanced when an Elder is experiencing helplessness and boredom.** Providing opportunities to balance the giving and receiving of care in an Elder's life may not change whether pain is experienced, but it does increase the likelihood of asking for what's needed to address the pain (Principle Four). Variety and spontaneity (Principle Five) can bring a needed distraction that can shift focus away from the pain for those small moments of joy that make the day bearable. Simple pleasures (Principle Six) can often include experiences that relieve pain and fill the heart in ways that medication and treatment cannot. Eden Registry Members have found many creative ways to provide opportunities to balance care, infuse life with variety and spontaneity, and make simple pleasures an important part of daily life.
- **Nurses and other healthcare providers committed to developing the care partner team's pain management skills (Principle Nine) will invest time in education.** All care partners (Elders, families, and employees) must learn how to recognize pain symptoms, whether the Elder can speak for herself or not. When "behaviors" occur they are immediately seen as unmet needs and the team huddles to identify the root cause and address it (Principle Seven and Eight). When skills and strengths are recognized among members of the care partner team, and fully utilized, the Elders benefit.

- **Professional care partners work with the Elder, or those closest to her, to identify her goals for managing pain when it occurs (Principles Seven and Eight).** This includes identifying what medications work best, what non-pharmacological interventions are successful, what pain levels are considered tolerable, and what signals the Elder uses to express her pain. Genuine human caring (Principle Seven) dictates that the Elder should have autonomy over her pain control regimen with full support of the care partner team.
- **Neighborhood Guide Training, offered by The Eden Alternative, includes modules that teach the empowered team skills in quality improvement.** This includes evaluating and performing root cause analysis, when pain occurs for an Elder. When the team is empowered, and given the tools and skills needed to participate in quality improvement, they are more likely to hold each other accountable for sharing information related to the recognition and alleviation of pain. The modules also teach good communication skills and create a Team Communicator Role that focuses on making sure all care partners have the information they need to be attuned to the needs of the Elders.
- **The whole care partner team (Elders, families, employees, volunteers) needs to receive education that focuses on recognizing and treating pain (Principle Nine).** Everyone's expertise is needed to recognize pain, so that it can be addressed quickly, before it exceeds the Elder's pain threshold. This expertise can also be helpful in identifying when adverse effects from medication may be interfering in the Elder's daily routine. Many non-pharmacological approaches to addressing pain do not require professional licensure or certification. Teach alternative approaches to pain management to all care partner team members who want to learn, as appropriate. This strengthens the Elder's sense of security, as she knows her team is ready to support her well-being. These are also great life skills for everyone to have.
- **Wise leadership recognizes the need to explore the practices of palliative and hospice care (Principle Ten).** Building relationships across the larger community and bringing in the needed education and resources to support pain management at the end-of-life is important. Bring meaning to this life passage (Principle Six) by identifying ways to enhance comfort for the Elders and her care partners. Eden Registry Members grow teams of individuals who will spend one-on-one time with an Elder at the end-of-life, so that she is never alone. These individuals can come from within or beyond the community, and often include the animal companions of the Elders as well.