

PITIFUL PLEAS

by Duane Starkey 10-11-2013

I walked into the lobby of a large nursing home that we had acquired recently. Just as I was approaching the information desk, someone pulled on the sleeve of my coat. I turned to see a small elderly woman staring at my face. She spoke before I did, saying, "Can you please help me? I don't belong here and I want to go home. Tears streamed down her face as she raised quivering arms toward me."

I asked her what was wrong. I'll never forget her answer and the way it tugged my heart.

She said, "I was living alone at my home, but the kids decided I should sell and move in with one of them. It was okay for awhile, but they got tired of moving me around among them and finally my daughter had to get a job. Raising her children, taking care of me and trying to work was too much for her. They didn't know what else to do, so they put me in here. There's really not a lot wrong with me and I can do pretty well on my own. Since my husband died, I have been lonely living alone and I guess I talked about it too much to my daughters. They sold my house and took all my savings so I could qualify for Medicaid in this place. Please get me out of here. I'm lost among all these people and I am afraid at night so they give me all these pills to make me sleep. I feel depressed with all this medicine that keeps me doped up. Mister, look at me heart and see my needs. Please help me."

These words I am writing cannot describe the pain and sorrow I felt as I heard her pitiful pleas. I told her I would do something to help her that day and I did. I went to the administrator and told him about the woman and her situation. Our social worker was brought in and started working with the family to begin visitation on a regular basis. We initiated special day activities for smaller group meetings and sharing. We modified her medications to meet her personal desires. We brought pastors and church members of the patients including hers for luncheons and visitation. Last time I saw her she was laughing and happy.

Fact is, she should never have been there in the first place. She and her family had other options if they had only known or took time to research the situation. Using home health aides and adult day care centers would have enabled her to live several more years at home instead of all those years in a nursing home. Physical and mental exercise combined with good diet and social interchange would have been life changing benefits without those pitiful pleas.

PLEASE HELP ME

I want to tell you about another pitiful plea that still lingers in my heart and mind. I went to a small town in East Texas to look at another nursing home that we were considering buying. It was pretty cold that day and I rushed through the front door to escape the wind. I had taken about five steps across the lobby when I felt someone staring at me. It's hard to describe the feeling, but it got my attention. I stopped and looked across the lobby and saw this big old wooden type wheelchair. Perched in the wheelchair was a tiny woman staring across the lobby with silent tears streaming down her face. So help

me God, I was drawn to her like a magnet. She looked up at me as I approached and started sobbing and trying to talk. I asked her what was wrong. This is what she told me. "Do you know where my husband is and is he all right? He always comes to see me every day about this time and he hasn't come. I'm afraid and I miss him so. Please bring him to me so he can hold me and tell me everything is going to be fine.

Now friends, this was not my nursing home and this was not my patient. In other words, what could I do as an outsider? Well, I told her I would find out where her husband was and help her. I went to the front desk and finally got the woman behind the desk to speak to me. "You see that little woman over there in the wheelchair, she needs help" I said.

"Yeah, I see her. Happens every time her husband is late or misses coming. He called me earlier and said he was going to be late because his car wouldn't start. I've been busy and just haven't had time to tell her." Her attitude and her excuse really made me angry, but I couldn't say much. I did tell her she should have taken the time to help the patient first and paperwork second. All that got me was a glare and a stare. I went back over to the tiny lady and explained the problem and assured her that her husband was okay and would be there soon. The sobs went away and the tears dried while a tiny smile of relief came on her face. The gratitude in her eyes shed tears in my heart. Her pitiful pleas planted seeds of determination to do something about patient care and the welfare of seniors. What is the benefit of having knowledge and insight of senior healthcare and not share the wisdom with my fellow man? That's why I am writing these words to present and future generations. You will be old one day and I am trying to help you avoid making pitiful pleas.

Once again this problem could easily be resolved if the family knew their options and how to utilize them. The husband was able to drive and be of some help to the little wife. They could have a home aide come in once or twice a week to help at home. The husband could have enrolled both of them in adult day care at a center and he and his wife could attend as much as 5 days a week. They would be together and have help and entertainment among new friends with new activities to improve their life style. If he was not always able to drive, the center provides transportation to and from the center. If he needed some time off to himself, he had the freedom to do so. I'm telling you this before you get to that time in your life. People get old and most of them cannot afford expensive care. Their lives can be so much better if they only knew how. That's why I'm telling you now and leaving these words of advice for future generations. There is hope and help for the elderly and I am asking you to participate on their behalf. Teaching and training them about senior care will make a world of difference for all of us. The emotional stress and financial burden on seniors and their caregivers affects everyone, directly or through funding their costs of care. Preventive care reduces and delays the onset of stress and costs. We as a people must change our approach in healthcare as our population ages. The focus has always been on the severity of the illness with funding based on ratings of acute and extended care. We change oil in cars and focus on maintenance to prevent costly breakdowns. We need to train and educate our populace in general, with emphasis to seniors, to maintain an active lifestyle and monitor their physical and mental conditions for early awareness of health problems. We emphasize education for the younger generation to prepare them for the business world. We need to teach priorities for preventive medicine and early diagnosis of disease and illness to the older segment of our population. Educate everyone

about the aging process and the current options available to them for healthcare before they or a family member are devastated by a severe health problem.

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