



Aged care through the festive season and beyond



As Christmas approaches once again, it is interesting to see that there are many aged care homes in Australia celebrating the festivities amidst a backdrop of a whole host of faiths, cultures and traditions.

Although not all observe Christmas as a religious event – many are still keen to treat the period as an opportunity to celebrate family and friendship.

Here, *The Standard* takes a look at how four very different Australian aged care homes deal with Christmas and their residents' wider religious and cultural needs.

Christmas Eve is a grand affair at the Polish Home

Along with Easter, Christmas is an important time of the year in the Roman Catholic calendar and a time of great spiritual awareness and tradition at the Polish Retirement Home in Bayswater, Victoria.

Of the 30 residents, 29 are from Poland and one from the former Czechoslovakia, and all begin Christmas preparations in earnest well before December, says diversional therapist Beata Erkieta.

"Residents have been making decorations since about August," she smiles. "It's just the way we are in the Polish tradition."

She says following the St Nicholas day celebrations on 6 December, the most important date of the period is Christmas Eve or 'Wigilia' when Polish people traditionally look for the first star in the sky. Wigilia comes from the Latin word vigilare, which means 'to watch' and which literally means 'eve'.

"In line with Polish tradition, we begin the feasting when we see the first star, therefore Christmas is also called

Continued page 2

In this issue:

- Just a word
Page 2
- A Russian Christmas
Page 3
- Indigenous culture in rural Queensland
Page 4
- Jewish homes require sensitivity in staff members
Page 5
- Focus on Results and Processes guide
Page 6
- Director profile
Page 8





It's hard to believe we're wrapping up another year already. Looking back, the aged care industry has a lot to be proud of. In September, we released a special edition of *The Standard*, outlining the aged care industry's performance against the Accreditation Standards. Almost 92% of homes were assessed as being fully compliant with all 44 of the expected outcomes at their latest site or review audit. And of the homes that had some non compliance, it was mainly in one or two areas, with the majority quickly addressing the issues so that care for residents was restored.

We also released a special edition of *The Standard* in May, focusing on how homes can prepare for an unannounced visit. We sent out a copy of the *Results and processes* guide and a free wall planner along with that edition. The special edition on unannounced visits proved extremely popular, and we continue to receive requests for additional copies. If you require more copies, please contact editor@accreditation.org.au

This year we have improved *The Standard* based on feedback

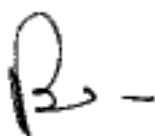
from readers, and have focused on a different expected outcome each month; from continuous improvement to infection control, oral and dental care, independence, medication management, leisure interests and activities, human resource management and information systems.

This month's focus is on cultural and spiritual life and highlights the diversity we have in aged care, and how homes identify and accommodate individual needs. It's great to hear that the celebrations for many homes extend past the party hats and bon-bons.

Our aim for *The Standard* in 2008 is to build further on the themed focus, and to develop the publication so that it can be used as an education and training tool for homes – to see what other homes are doing to address an issue, and how their advice can be adapted to the individual circumstances of your home.

We welcome any feedback on what you would like to read about in *The Standard*, or any ideas on how it can be improved. Please email editor@accreditation.org.au with your views.

As a final note, I would like to wish staff, management and residents, relatives and volunteers of all aged care homes across Australia, a very happy Christmas and a healthy and safe 2008.



Mark Brandon,
Chief Executive Officer

'Gwiazdka' which means the little star which is the star of Bethlehem," says Erkieta.

"On this night, all the residents, family and friends get together around a big dinner table," says Erkieta. "We also traditionally leave one free setting at the table in case an unexpected guest or stranger arrives."

The Christmas meal begins with "Oplietk" or the breaking of bread when health and good fortune is bestowed on all those present. The meal traditionally consists of twelve dishes on Christmas Eve which is a night that sees Poles refraining from eating meat. Beetroot soup with mushroom dumplings, fried fish fillets, herring in oil, salads and sauerkraut is what is commonly seen on the dinner table that night.

"After dinner, we exchange 'Santa' gifts and sing some beautiful Polish carols, before attending Holy Mass in the evening at our local church," Erkieta continues. "It really is a beautiful day and evening."

Christmas drinks of wine and traditional Polish vodka 'Zydnia' complete the festivities, she says.





A Russian Christmas

At Sydney's Strathfield Home for the Aged, Christmas is celebrated not just once on 25 December, but again on 7 January which is the Russian Christmas Day.

Set up in 1963 by the Australian Council of Churches for elderly Russians, Strathfield Home for the Aged continues to provide a home which assists residents in maintaining their individual Russian traditions and customs, alongside those of local customs.

New Year is celebrated three times at the home, due to the observance of different calendars – calendar new year, old-style Russian new year and Chinese New Year. Easter is also celebrated twice most years as the Orthodox and Catholic/Protestant calendars do not always coincide, says Tanya Garkusha, part-time manager at Strathfield.

She says that the 35 residents, of whom just over half are Russian, are able to receive all communications at the home, in both Russian and English. "All of our announcements are given in the two languages, so nobody is ever excluded."

Accordingly, the staff (five are of Chinese background and the remaining six have Russian backgrounds) are provided with training materials in both Russian and Chinese translations. Currently, there is just one Chinese resident at the home. Mina Nikigemko was previously married to a Russian and now fully embraces the Russian culture and traditions, alongside her Chinese heritage.

"Mina is always keen to entertain other residents at Chinese New Year, with her costumes and traditions," says Strathfield supervisor Maria Bronnikova. "Christmas itself is not celebrated in Chinese culture but Chinese New Year is a fun occasion where we make a lot of effort and celebrate with Chinese music, dancing and singing.

"Everyone gives each other red envelopes (red is the lucky colour in China) which contain gold chocolate money designed to bestow prosperity for the coming year."

In keeping with tradition, oranges are also exchanged in order to wish each other good health and a long life.

"Non-Russians are certainly not ever put off from coming to stay at Strathfield," Tanya says.

"We have a very warm, family type of atmosphere here that does not exclude any other cultures or religions.

"Indeed, we often have visiting Anglican or Catholic priests who take residents to local churches."

She says Christmas is an extra special time at the home, with many of the residents taking part in the festive Hostel Choir. "Our Russian residents sing traditional English carols and our English-speaking residents sing the Russian folk songs. For this we write the words out phonetically to overcome the issue of the Russian alphabet. It's all great fun and many families and friends get together with us to join in with the Russian festive meals and activities."

Tanya says Strathfield is very grateful to its dedicated volunteers who inspire residents to resume or take up singing or dancing.

As part of the festivities, and in the weeks leading up to Christmas, residents help to make decorations to adorn the Christmas Tree. And for Russian Easter, they paint eggs and grow wheat grass – the traditional decoration symbolic of new growth.

Some enthusiastic non-Russian residents are now even enjoying Russian folk dancing, adds Tanya.

White Russians

The history of the Russian/Chinese relationship dates back to the time of the Russian Revolution of 1917 - 1920, when many Russians fled across the northern Chinese border to escape the Communist regime. They settled mainly in Harbin, Manchuria and Shanghai. From 1950, they began to be uprooted again to escape the conditions caused by World War 2 and the Chinese Cultural Revolution. This time, they scattered to places such as the USA, Canada, South America and Australia. These people became known as White Russians.



Indigenous culture in rural Queensland



Cultural awareness looms large at rural Emerald Creek, Queensland facility, the Fred Leftwich Rest Home.

Of the ten residents, half are Indigenous Australians – either Aboriginal or Torres Islanders and half are non-Indigenous Australians.

“We are just one big happy family here, and we certainly don’t discriminate in who we can take,” says program manager Catherine Gertz.

She says that varying languages are used between residents from different tribes, namely the Kukudjungan tribe and the Kukuyalanji tribe, but that this does not present any problems. “There are various words between dialects that a tribe may not understand or may have slightly different meanings for, but on the whole we tend to get by very well.”

Staff are comprised of a 50-50 mix between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and according to Gertz, all go out of their way to make residents feel special and at home. “We have often had residents here that may either have no remaining family or whose family, for whatever reason, does not come to visit them. However many of our staff bring their own children or other relatives to visit our residents and as such, we maintain a very warm environment.”

Staff involvement also extends to the annual traditional celebrations, in particular, the annual NAIDOC (National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee) celebrations of the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

“Every year this is a big deal for us and we celebrate with a cake, flags and traditional dancers,” says Gertz. “Often the dancers may be made up of staff members or even their family members.”

Christmas, despite having little cultural or religious significance for some residents of the home, is still celebrated as a happy, family occasion, she says, with staff, residents and family all coming together for a traditional ‘hangi’ as the focus of the day’s cuisine. Aboriginals are also able to hunt on sacred ground during this time, so this also provides an interest for all the families, as does the native dancing which takes place in traditional costume.

“We never have a shortage of people who want to entertain us with didgeridoo playing or boomerang throwing either,” continues Gertz.

“And the Islanders get involved with the traditional drums, clapping sticks and hula dancers. It’s all good fun and everyone joins in, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Nobody is ever excluded.

“We don’t currently have any residents of any other strong religious faiths here, but if we do, we would always be keen to assist them with this by taking them to whatever place of worship they want to attend, or even getting them to come to us.”



Jewish homes require sensitivity in staff members

Christmas may not be a day of religious significance in the Jewish culture but there are plenty of other religious celebrations to be enjoyed.

This is none more evident than at the Jewish Care-run Montefiore Homes Community Residence in Windsor, Victoria.

"Celebrating Chanukah in early December is a large event," says Jewish Care chief executive, Bruce Salvin, who oversees a total of four aged care homes in the group.

Menorahs (Jewish candelabras) are traditionally lit at this time of year. Residents busy themselves with making food such as latkes (potato like fritters) and ponschkas (traditional doughnuts) to celebrate the occasion in the homes' strictly kosher kitchens.

With the range of nationalities making up the residents including English, Russian, Polish and Hungarian to name just a few, Salvin says there are a wide variety of tastes and cultures to cater for. "It can be challenging," he says, "and we often get residents saying things like 'but my mother didn't cook that dish that way!' But we are as flexible and accommodating as we can be, and normally residents are very happy with the cuisine that we provide them."

Bruce notes however, sometimes extra care must be taken to understand special resident concerns. "We have many holocaust survivors amongst our Jewish residents and we therefore

have to be sensitive to this," he says. "For example, we have had times when residents have had issues with our assisted showers in bringing back certain memories of the past. We just have to be sensitive about this kind of thing."

Accordingly, staff – who are mostly not Jewish – are trained to have a basic understanding of Jewish customs and history and the Melbourne Holocaust Museum is generally a first port of call for new staff.

The homes also have access to on-site synagogues as well as rabbis to take care of their spiritual needs.

"There are only 50,000 Jews in the Melbourne area, but we are a robust community who knows how to look after its aged population," says Salvin.



Want to know more?

For more information on providing culturally appropriate aged care, including resources and information on training, visit any of the following websites:

- The Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing (Vic) – www.culturaldiversity.com.au
- NSW Transcultural Aged Care Service – www.nswtacs.org.au
- Diversicare (Qld) – www.diversicare.com.au/index.php
- Multicultural Aged Care Incorporated (SA) – www.mac.org.au



Focus on cultural and spiritual life from *Results and processes guide*



Each month we are profiling some of the expected outcomes of the Accreditation Standards. This month we focus on expected outcome 3.8 Cultural and spiritual life.

Assessors look for the following results:

- Management demonstrates its processes, systems and external relations are effective in valuing and fostering each individual resident's interests, customs, beliefs and cultural and ethnic backgrounds.
- Advice from residents/representatives confirm they are satisfied the home values and fosters residents' individual interests, customs, beliefs and cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Assessors consider the following processes:

- How does the home assess and communicate residents' individual interests, customs, beliefs and cultural and ethnic backgrounds? How does the home communicate the way that this should be reflected in care and services provided? For example, is there:
 - o consultation with residents/representatives or others, for example, spiritual or cultural advisors

- o consideration of past and current cultural (including cultural aspects not necessarily related to ethnicity or country of origin), religious, spiritual and ethnic practices
- o identification of requirements to support each resident's ongoing cultural and ethnic needs
- o identification of language assistance required for effective communication
- o identification of food and drink needs and preferences
- o identification of leisure interest and activity needs and preferences?
- How is provision for residents' observation of interests, customs and beliefs planned and then communicated to relevant staff? This includes:
 - o appropriate community activities
 - o appropriate catering requirements
 - o observation of particular holy or special days.
- Are care and lifestyle services consistent with the plan and delivered in a way which fosters and values individual residents' interests, customs, beliefs and cultural and ethnic

backgrounds. This includes:

- o access to appropriate service or support staff such as interpreters
- o support to attend and participate in activities as indicated in the plan
- o particular religious or spiritual requirements during illness or end stages of care
- o involvement of culturally-specific groups.
- How does the home review its practices to ensure care and services are delivered in a way that fosters and values individual residents' interests, customs, beliefs and cultural and ethnic backgrounds? For example:
 - o Are staff practices monitored and improved as appropriate?
 - o Are links with cultural and community groups developed and encouraged?
 - o Is the effectiveness of the program/s evaluated?

Links to related expected outcomes

Expected outcome 1.8 Information systems

The home should have systems in place to ensure effective communication with residents from all cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

For more information on the results and processes of other expected outcomes, you can download the Results and processes guide from the Agency's website, (97 pages) or you can purchase a copy of 'The Accreditation Essentials'. Go to www.accreditation.org.au and click on 'Resources for sale: Accreditation essentials'.

Expected outcomes of Standard Two

Components of expected outcome 3.8 Cultural and spiritual life affect the performance of all expected outcomes relating to health and personal care, especially expected outcomes 2.9 Palliative care and 2.10 Nutrition and hydration.

Other expected outcomes of Standard Three

Cultural and spiritual considerations are inherent in all expected outcomes of Standard Three, for instance, the facilitation of leisure activities should be culturally appropriate, choice and decision-making should take into account ethnic (including language) backgrounds, residents should have access to appropriate community groups as requested, and emotional support should be relevant to the cultural and other beliefs of the resident. Aspects of expected outcome 3.8 Cultural and spiritual life are also encompassed in the Charter of residents' rights and responsibilities.

Expected outcome 4.8 Catering, cleaning and laundry services

The home should have systems in place to ensure residents are provided with meals appropriate to their cultural backgrounds.

Governance and Accreditation Toolbox

The role of directors is becoming more demanding and increasingly scrutinised.

Boards of residential aged care organisations must keep pace with this more demanding environment.

The Agency has developed a comprehensive yet easy-to-use learning package to help boards and proprietors better understand their role in monitoring the performance of homes in relation to the Accreditation Standards.

Sections of the package can also be used for inductions of key personnel, job orientation or even general staff induction, training and introduction to aged care.

To order, or for more information and a comprehensive overview of the Governance and Accreditation Toolbox including key features, visit our website www.accreditation.org.au.





3 Sue
Macri
AM

The Standard is featuring a profile on the directors of the Agency.

This month, we profile Sue Macri AM.

Her background includes:

- Consultant, Health and Aged Care Industry
- Director, RSL LifeCare, The War Vets Village, Narrabeen NSW
- Advisor, Kell and Rigby Living Pty Ltd NSW
- Advisor, Guild Group of Companies (Aged Care Division)
- Fellow, College of Nursing (NSW)
- Member, Royal College of Nursing Australia
- Member, Australian Institute of Company Directors
- Previously CEO of ANHECA/ ACAA federally for two years (1993-1995) and of NSW for 13 years (1993-2006)
- Awarded Honorary Doctorate by the Australian Catholic University in May 2007 for outstanding contribution to aged care and to nursing and nursing education and training.

- Became a Member of the Order of Australia on Australia Day 2007 for services to aged care, nursing and nursing education.

What perspective/historical experience do you bring with you?

A long history of working within the non-government sectors of health and aged care, joining the private hospital sector in nursing management in January 1974 until July 1987. In 1978 I was on the management team which became the first commercially-owned private hospital to gain accreditation through the Australian Council on Health Care Standards (ACHS). I became a Nurse Surveyor for the ACHS for some ten years and also participated in their education program nationally and internationally.

I joined aged care in July 1987 as the National Nursing & Research Policy Advisor for the then Australian Nursing Homes & Extended Care Association (ANHECA), when the Outcome Standards and the Resident Classification Instrument (RCI) were being introduced. Until July 2006 I worked at an industry association level having been involved in the negotiations and policy initiatives across all programs impacting on the non-government aged care sectors.

How do you see aged care compared with other human services?

Aged care is much more regulated than the private and public health care systems. However, it must be said that an industry that is reliant almost totally on

government funding and taxpayers' dollars must accept the requirements for increased accountability. It would be great to see a higher degree of trust and balance by all stakeholders delivering care and services in the aged care industry (providers, consumers and government). With that trust comes a level of maturity which I believe is imperative if we wish to have an industry in which people want to and are committed to work in.

What has been the biggest change in aged care over the past ten years?

There is no doubt that the level of professionalism which has increasingly been visible through the accreditation program and the aged care industry's ability to meet the challenges, would have to be one of the most significant changes. The industry is attracting highly skilled and committed people into aged care and it is no longer seen as the 'Cinderella' of the healthcare system.

I believe this industry has much to be proud of and I would just love to see more positive stories in the media applauding the work of all who choose to work in an ever challenging environment. You only need to spend two days at the Better Practice events to hear and see what organisations are doing in terms of innovation and best practice, to get an appreciation of where we have come from and what is being achieved.



The Aged Care

Standards and Accreditation Agency Ltd

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