

Kara Aukes



Why did you choose older adult services as a career?

I was the first grandchild born on both sides of my family. My parents were in their early twenties, so I was blessed to have the opportunity to grow up with most of my great-grandparents. Eventually, each one of these grandparents required nursing home care. They were moved into the local nursing home, St. Luke's Lutheran Care Center, where my aunt Sue was employed as a LPN. My mom would take me to visit them often, and throughout elementary I volunteered for the adult daycare at St. Luke's. When I was 16, my aunt encouraged me to take the CNA course and work at St. Luke's. I loved volunteering there when I was younger and had many happy memories at the nursing home. The residents had taught me a great deal, and it was fulfilling to see the joy that I could bring to their lives just by simply taking the time to listen to their stories. Furthermore, I had been considering pursuing a nursing degree upon graduating high school the following year. I began working as a CNA in February, 2001, and continued working part time throughout college. I have been employed in a nursing position at a long-term care center ever since.

What do you want to do with your life within the older adult services profession?

I am currently employed as the Assistant Director of Nursing at Parker Oaks Communities. This has been a wonderful opportunity and learning experience. I plan to return to college this fall to pursue my BSN, as I currently have my associate RN degree. I believe completing my BSN will open more opportunities for me and provide a better, more well rounded, knowledge of nursing. Once I have completed my BSN, I may consider continuing with college with the goals of attaining a degree as a Family Nurse Practitioner, with a focus in geriatrics.

How do you hope to impact the profession?

I am a young nurse; I graduated high school at age 17, and had just turned 20 when I received my associate RN degree. I hope to pave the way for younger nurses who are interested in geriatrics, and encourage more nurses to consider geriatrics as a specialized area of health care. I feel that the health and well being of our older adults becomes overshadowed and is not always given the attention it deserves. I also wish to play an active role in the culture change we are currently undergoing by supporting and offering new ideas to inspire a more home-like environment and focus on individualized care. Another area I hope to impact is the stigma surrounding long-term care centers. For a long time, our facilities have been known as a place to be cared for when one is nearing death. However, the face of nursing homes has changed drastically. We now care for a broad aspect of clients; from hospice patients to middle-aged adults recovering from surgery and needing rehab to return home. I also hope to find a way to bring some positive publicity to nursing homes. Too often the media paints such an inaccurate picture of long-term care facilities, focusing on abuse and neglect. I would like to open the public to the positive side of nursing homes, and buffer some of the exaggerated negative media. Over time, I am going to try to gain a better understanding and follow more closely the legislative aspect of nursing homes in regards to financing and budget. I have written letters to congressman in the past on this issue, and plan to continue doing so as the need arises.

Provide a specific example of when you positively impacted someone through the care or services you provided.

I have many memories of the positive differences I have made throughout my years in the nursing profession. It's the reason I continue in this career and hope to further my education in this field. One memory that comes to mind more often than others is a time I was caring for a terminal cancer patient. He was in his sixties and had a unique zest for life. He could also be a bit difficult to deal with as he was very stubborn and set in his ways. Many of the other staff dreaded caring for him, and would avoid him if they could. However, I enjoyed his banter, and he and I got along well. One night I had given him a foot soak, trimmed his toenails, and was rubbing lotion into his feet. He began to cry. I asked if he was having pain. He responded no. I inquired as to why he was crying. He replied, "You have no idea how good it feels to have somebody touch you. Once you get sick and people find out you're dying, it's like they think death is contagious, and if they touch you, they'll die too." That man passed away within the next week. I was sad to see him pass, but relieved to see his suffering end, and overjoyed to know that I was able provide the care he needed to feel human and deserving, even if it was only a simple foot rub.