TEACHING NURSING HOMES: THE CASE FOR LONG-TERM CARE ADMINISTRATION

Susan Brown Eve
Hiram J. Friedsam
Cora A. Martin
Herbert Shore
North Texas State University, Denton

The experiences of an educational program in long-term care administration that has used nursing homes as an integral part of the training of new administrators for eighteen years are described. The five part program includes 1) courses in gerontology, 2) courses in business administration, 3) an integrative seminar in long-term care administration, 4) a nonresearch thesis, and 5) a seven-month internship in a long-term care setting. Issues discussed include choosing field work facilities, supervision of students in the field, and expectations for student performance in the field setting.

Although the concept of the "teaching nursing home" has come to be associated with Robert Butler's (1981) well-known paper and with funding programs that have followed it, many nursing homes have long had affiliations with a variety of educational institutions and programs. Leslie Libow's comment that "there is no true geriatric medicine without the nursing home, and...there can be no enlightened nursing home without a geriatric medicine" (1982, p. 134) could be paralleled in nursing, social work, occupational therapy, and other health-related fields, including long-term care administration. From our perspective, a teaching nursing home exists whenever students from an education program are placed in an "enlightened home" in order to achieve specific educational objectives.

The primary purpose of this paper is to comment on the experiences of an educational program in long-term care administration that has utilized teaching nursing homes, as we have defined them, for eighteen years. From the beginning it has been assumed that an extended field placement (or "internship") is a necessary element in the program and that the cooperation of "teaching nursing homes,"

as we have defined them, would be indispensable to our success. To date, 132 homes throughout the United States have provided supervised educational experiences for our students. Several of these homes have accepted students in most of the years of the program's existence.

CURRICULUM STRUCTURE

To understand the role of the field placement and, therefore, the role of the "teaching nursing home" with respect to it requires an overview of the program's curriculum structure, which, despite changes in specific courses, has remained constant. That, in turn, requires a brief comment concerning its origin.

As part of the planning process, Friedsam, supported by a planning grant from the Administration on Aging, interviewed a reputational sample of thirty leaders in the field of long-term care administration, most of whom were among the founders and leaders of the American Association of Homes for the Aging. As was typical of the field at that time, their educational preparation had been for areas such as social work, the ministry, and business; none had been trained to be the administrator of a long-term care facility. All were supportive of the idea of a specialized training program in long-term care administration, with a single exception who believed that long-term care should be part of a hospital and health administration program. A major portion of the lengthy interviews that Friedsam conducted with these administrators was devoted to obtaining their ideas about the content of a long-term care curriculum, including the role and length of a field placement, which all regarded as essential for students who, it was correctly assumed, would have little or no background either in long-term care or in administration. (A more extended discussion of these interviews is included in Friedsam, 1968).

The curriculum that emerged from the planning process, of which the thirty administrators were obviously an integral part, had—and has—five parts, all of which, in the philosophy of the Center, are considered essential to education for long-term care administration. (See also Martin & Friedsam, 1981).

The first part is based on the assumption that any student preparing to work in the field of aging must develop an appropriate philosophy of care for the elderly. In our view, this philosophy must rest upon a knowledge of aging and the aged that is best provided by gerontology. In our case, the specific course content includes the sociology and psychology of aging; an analysis of the
health delivery system in the United States, particularly as it serves (or fails to serve) the elderly; and a social policy course covering federal, state, and local service programs for older people that is intended to provide the student with a sense of the existing and potential linkages between long-term care and the larger service community and emergent issues in this area.

The second core area is in business administration, which obviously is intended to provide a basis for the student's understanding of management functions in the narrow sense of that term. It is a twelve-semester-hour core made up of one course in management, one in managerial accounting, one in computer applications to long-term care management, and one on the legal environment of business. Although these courses are open to other students in the university, specific sections are taught for the long-term care students.

The third element is what we have called an integrative seminar in long-term care administration, which is designed to tie the first two elements together. It addresses questions of how a wide range of factors, from resident characteristics and architectural design to organizational arrangements and state and federal regulations, impinges upon the role and responsibilities of the administrator. We consider it essential that the seminar be taught by an experienced administrator who also has appropriate academic credentials because it is the first of the links between the classroom and practice.

The fourth part of the curriculum structure, although the typical student usually completes it last, is what is called at North Texas a "problem in lieu of thesis," which is a thesis but which permits students to write on topics that are not research oriented. We have tried, with some success, to make the "problem in lieu of thesis" requirement into another link between the classroom and practice; that is, we have encouraged students to select their topics in terms of problems encountered in their internships or, because many students do not complete this requirement by the time they complete their internships, in their subsequent employment. Because of the difficulties that this creates, not the least of which is that some students never complete the "problem in lieu," consideration is being given to changing the timing of the requirement.

The fifth part of the curriculum is a required seven-month administrative internship or field placement in a long-term care setting that has been approved by the faculty. It is the most important of the links that we have tried to forge between the classroom and practice, and we cannot overemphasize its importance for students who have had no previous experience in long-term
care. The remainder of this paper focuses on our experiences in establishing the field placement or internship program as a part of the North Texas program in long-term care administration.

THE FIELD PLACEMENT IN THE TEACHING NURSING HOME

As Peterson (1984) noted in a recent article in The Gerontologist, North Texas and the University of South Florida are the two oldest master’s degree programs in gerontology in the United States. Of the nineteen current master’s degree programs, NTSU has the most rigorous internship program, requiring a seven-month, 1,200-clock-hour practicum for which the student receives six semester hours of credit, which is in addition to thirty-nine hours of course work and the thesis.

The purpose of the internship is to facilitate the student’s transition from theory to practice. It gives the student the opportunity to verify, test, and practice under supervision what has been learned in the classroom in a real situation in the world of work.

Because the field placement (or internship or practicum or clinical experience) is an integral part of the student’s preparation for his or her profession for which academic credit is given, in our view it is a major responsibility of the educational institution. But it is obviously a responsibility that is shared with the facilities in which students are placed. Seen in this light, a number of specific questions can be framed concerning the relationship between the educational institution and the facility. Some relate to the structure of the experience: How long should it be? Is a block or concurrent experience best? Some have to do with the agency: What are its expectations of the student in terms of preparation and performance? What are its expectations of the educational institution? What is the quality of the supervision it provides? Others have to do with the educational institution: How much control of the student should (or can) it retain? Is the agency meeting its responsibilities? How does one know what is really going on? To whom is he or she responsible? What are the student’s goals? The success of the field placement experience depends upon aligning three sets of expectations: those of the agency, those of the educational institution, and those of the student.
CHOOSING FIELD WORK FACILITIES

The first problem faced in developing placements is the selection of the participating facilities. Among the criteria for selection that we have used are the skill of the administrator (supervisor), the type and breadth of the facility's service program, its willingness to provide space and supervision for the student, and its responsiveness to the needs of the student, including providing a stipend. During the early phase of the Center's program, the placement problem was largely solved by the willingness of many of the thirty administrators whom Friedsam interviewed to accept students. Although several of those facilities are still accepting our students, the number of "teaching nursing homes" in which students have been placed is now 132. As that figure may suggest, placement is national in scope rather than local or even regional.

National placement has undoubtedly been a major factor in whatever success our program has enjoyed. Obviously, it greatly increases the pool of acceptable facilities. It also increases our responsiveness to the interests of students in terms of facility programs and geographic location, which is important because most of our full-time students are drawn from out of state, and it is responsible to some extent for the national placement of our graduates. A less obvious but increasingly important consequence is that, as some former students have moved into positions to do so, they have "repaid" the Center by creating field placements in their facilities. At the same time, national placement for field work exacerbates the problem of adequate supervision.

SUPERVISION OF FIELD PLACEMENTS

Supervision is a shared responsibility of the Center and the facility. Initially, the program's portion of its share of the responsibility was met in several ways. With generous external funding, it was possible for the Director of Field Work to make two personal visits to each facility during the course of a student's placement. In addition, in the very first years of the program, funds were available to permit a meeting of the preceptors at which all aspects of the curriculum and the prospective placement could be discussed. As external funding declined, both of these mechanisms had to be abandoned.

A third technique of supervision, used from the beginning, was a requirement that students submit written reports on their place-
ment experiences weekly, and it has necessarily become the major source of the program's contact with the student "intern." The reports are confidential and are used only for supervision and teaching. They also serve as a constant reminder to the student of his or her role and responsibilities *qua* student.

Emphasis is placed on the reports not only for contact but because they offer an opportunity to teach analysis, interpretation, and reporting and recording skills. What the student selects to record and the way in which it is observed and analyzed reflect what he or she is learning and enable the Director of Field Instruction to evaluate the student's understanding of the evaluative process. The report also affords the student an opportunity to develop necessary and important skills in preparing reports and in learning to interpret and evaluate a process of which he or she is a part. Some students share readily, some are quite transparent, and some are secretive, but all are interested in developing their diagnostic skills and their conscious use of the decision-making process (Friedsam, Martin, & Shore, 1973).

It may be noted that some face-to-face contact with interns still occurs in the context of meetings and conferences that students, Center faculty, and often supervisors attend. In the nature of the case, however, the opportunities are limited and can contribute only marginally to supervision. Telephone contact has been relied upon to help fill the need for contact, and students are encouraged to call as needed. The Director of Field Work also initiates calls to the student during the internship.

The facility's responsibility for supervision is lodged in the preceptor whom it assigns, who is usually, but not invariably, the administrator. The importance that has been attached to this role is suggested by the earlier reference to an annual meeting of preceptors, which finally eventuated in the preparation of a preceptor's manual that must now bear much of the burden of orienting new preceptors. The manual covers such topics as the objectives of the placement experience, orientation and appropriate assignments for the intern, expectations of supervisory influences, styles of supervision, and evaluation of student performance. In addition, the importance of the preceptor's role is emphasized through a written agreement between the Center and the facility that is prepared for each placement and through an (unpaid) appointment of the preceptor as a Field Instructor of the Center.

Although guidelines are provided, preceptors are free to develop their patterns of supervision within them. Some prepare schedules which are given to their department heads, some have prepared
job descriptions, and some ask students to prepare a daily log. Supervisors are asked to permit students to work closely with them, and most comply. As a result, students are able to sit in on all conferences and to participate in community meetings in which the supervisor of the facility is involved. Usually the student is assigned one or more problems or studies to undertake, projects that will be of value to the facility and the student alike. These problems have ranged from simple to highly complex ones necessitating data gathering and extensive analysis, and it is hoped that the fresh, questioning approach of students has resulted in some new or innovative ideas.

Regardless of the amount of contact between student and supervisor in different settings, the supervisor is expected to provide the student with at least a one-hour formal supervisory conference each week. During the early phase of a placement, formal conferences are usually more frequent. The basic tool for the conference can be the student’s weekly report or daily log, but that depends upon the preference of the preceptor.

The other major responsibility of the preceptor is evaluation, which has two dimensions. The obvious one is evaluation of the student’s performance, which is guided by a checklist prepared by the Center. The less obvious but equally important dimension is an evaluation of the student’s academic preparation as well as his or her preparation for the placement experience. In effect, the preceptor is asked to evaluate the Center’s curriculum as it is reflected by the student, and we can add that several specific changes in courses and course content have derived from this source.

STUDENTS IN FIELD PLACEMENTS

Students coming to a facility have a need for active participation and to perceive the placement as a potentially valuable experience. Although they are service oriented, they may encounter difficulty in making the transition to their new role. Consequently, considerable emphasis is placed on orientation to the placement experience. It is important that the student feel that his or her coming was planned for and that he or she has something to do that carries responsibility. Thus, the student’s perception of the orientation may be as important as its substance. Furthermore, orientation has learning potentials beyond the obvious matter of acquainting the student with the facility. It should help in understanding the importance of a proper orientation for all new employees in the facility in which the student is later employed.

Like supervision, responsibility for the orientation is shared
between the Center and the facility. The Center’s role is to make clear the objectives of the placement, including its expectations of the student, and to clarify for the student the way in which responsibility for supervision is shared. The facility’s role is to acquaint the student with its history and policies, its operation, and the activities that the student will undertake. Ordinarily, the facility provides access to useful documents and a brief rotation through all departments. Less formally, the student begins to learn about the network of relationships in the facility and to understand its formal and informal organization.

No matter how good the orientation is or how well student programs are designed, problems emerge, and some are recurrent. Communication with the preceptor is one example. A student may feel that communication with the supervisor is difficult; the supervisor is held in awe or is “too busy.” Sometimes the student, who is not ordinarily a member of the facility’s staff, becomes the recipient for staff complaints, gripes, and gossip. Such situations can produce uncertainty about “loyalty” and about what to share with the supervisor. Thus, the position of being a part of, yet outside, the formal structure creates tensions which each student must learn to deal with. Although the Center makes every effort to prepare students to handle this situation, it can be a major problem, one that can elicit requests for help from the faculty member responsible for the student’s internship.

Another problem arises from the tendency of students to find “instant solutions.” When assigned a problem, a student will often arrive at an immediate and usually simplistic solution that appears to be very obvious. Yet these solutions (often tried before in the facility) do not work. How to deal with these “failures” is one of the preceptor’s major challenges. He or she must provide an opportunity for the student to admit failure and to receive direction without fear of ridicule and to be challenged to better performance.

The reporting process can also be a problem area. Although the students have come from an academic setting in which written reports have played a major role, many of them find the filing of weekly reports an onerous task and tend at first simply to resort to diaries of daily activities. Here the faculty member and the preceptor have an opportunity to help the student understand the difference between analysis and reporting and the process of abstracting principles from unique events, understanding that will be critical to his or her future success as an administrator.
FINAL OBSERVATIONS

What we have sought to suggest in this paper is the necessity for a close working relationship between an academic program in long-term care administration and "teaching nursing homes" and to illustrate how certain aspects of that relationship have been developed in our program. Since publishing an evaluation of the program after ten years' experience (Friedsam & Martin, 1980), we have continued to collect data on former students three years after they complete their internships, and we have substantial evidence of how important the effort to maintain that relationship is. We know that approximately 90% of the former students accepted positions in long-term care programs and that a like percentage is still working in the field. We also know that many have moved beyond the day-to-day requirements of their employment to positions of leadership in local, state, and national associations in the field, which often permits the Center to reinforce and to strengthen its involvement with "teaching nursing homes."

We do not believe that our program is any longer unique, if it ever was, in stressing such involvement, but, as the number of gerontology programs with long-term care administration tracks increases, we believe that that involvement should be pursued by additional means. An especially important one, in our view, is a candid and continuing dialogue between administrators and academicians. To some extent, that can be accomplished through informal, one-on-one contacts, but more extensive and more formal efforts are required. The Association for Gerontology in Higher Education has taken some steps in that direction, as has the American Association of Homes for the Aging by including educational sessions in its annual meeting programs. State and regional meetings sponsored by organizations of long-term care administrators or gerontologists, acting independently or, preferably, in consort, or special conferences addressed to specific educational issues can also serve as forums.

From the discussions in these settings both groups—educators and practitioners—should clarify their expectations and limitations for the internship. Administrators have a right to expect, for example, that students in long-term care programs come to them with a certain level of skill and knowledge, but they must help to define that level. If they understand professional education, they have no right to expect a finished product, any more than a hospital would expect a new graduate of a medical school to be a finished product ready for the full practice of medicine. Gerontologists
must recognize the limits of classroom instruction and look to administrators who are interested in the quality of preparation of students to provide supervised field experiences and to participate in them as preceptors, and both must emphasize the role of preceptor as teacher and that the home that accepts students is a teaching nursing home. Beyond that—and definitely for the future—gerontologists and administrators must cooperate in establishing standards for education in long-term care administration. That will create, to borrow Libow's phrase, "a mechanism for mutual excellence" (1982, p. 134).

REFERENCES


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