

Risk Insights: Senior Living & LTC

Episode 6

Holiday tips for senior living and memory care

Welcome to the *Risk Insights: Senior Living & LTC* podcast, hosted by Tara Clayton with Marsh's Senior Living & Long-term Care Industry Practice. Each month, Tara, a former litigator and in-house attorney, speaks with industry experts about a variety of challenges and emerging risks facing the industry.

Tara Clayton:

Hello everyone and welcome to *Risk Insights*. I'm your host, Tara Clayton. In today's episode, I'm joined by a very special guest, Shavaughn Carey, who is the associate director with the Alzheimer's Association. Shavaughn is joining me today to discuss very important considerations for senior living and long-term care providers, especially during the holiday season, as it relates to working with residents with dementia. Hi Shavaughn. Thanks for joining us today.

Shavaughn Carey:

Hi, Tara. Thank you for having me.

Tara Clayton:

I'm really excited to have this conversation with you, Shavaughn. I think before we get started, do you mind just telling our audience a little bit about your background and your role at the Alzheimer's Association?

Shavaughn Carey:

Sure, no problem. I'm a licensed clinical social worker and as you stated, I've been an associate director with

the Alzheimer's Association for about seven years. There I work with the 24-hour helpline, and we are really a source of information and referral and emotional support for people who are living with dementia or people who have loved ones who are living with dementia.

Tara Clayton:

Thanks, Shavaughn. Extremely important topic, and I know a very significant population that the audience who tunes into our episode and the clients that we work with, a large population that we work with every single day is taking care of residents who live with dementia. And as you pointed out, also those, you know, family members who are going through the same journey. The big thing I wanted to talk with you about Shavaughn is we're in the midst of the holiday season right, and so the hustle and bustle that comes from new activity or more activity happening with our communities.

But before we dig into that, you know big picture, I just want to talk about some of the resources that the Alzheimer Association provides, not just for individuals who are living with dementia and their family members, but I think there's also some significant resources that you provide for providers and associates who work in this space. One of the things you had shared some information with me, Shavaughn, is there's the dementia care practice recommendations that the Alzheimer's Association has partnered with some different entities and published. So I'd like to talk with you just a little bit about what are those? What is the dementia care practice recommendations, and how do you utilize those resources?

Shavaughn Carey:

Yes. So the dementia care practice recommendations is really a compilation of recommendations that were developed with the intent for professional care providers who work with these individuals living with dementia in their families. The goal is really to better define quality care across settings and throughout the disease course, because of course many dementias are progressive, so it can change. The focus of these recommendations is to help adopt a person-centered approach in an effort to provide top-tier quality care on an ongoing continuum.

Tara Clayton:

Shavaughn, you talked about the importance of looking at person-centered care as it relates to some of the recommendations that the Alzheimer's Associations has put together. Can you elaborate more on what is patient-centered care and how do you look at that concept?

Shavaughn Carey:

Absolutely. So given that dementia symptoms can be progressive in nature with the symptoms presenting differently for everyone, person-centered care really refers to the care that's tailored to the abilities and changing needs of each of these individuals.

So with that mind, it's really thinking about what each person needs, and it can be helpful with consideration to working with residents to involve a comprehensive assessment with everyone. That comprehensive assessment can include things like cognitive health, physical health and functioning, behavioral status, sensory capabilities, decision making capacity, communication, personal background, cultural preferences, spiritual needs and preferences. It's really getting to the core of a person and understanding them as a whole to be able to effectively work with them as an individual and not based on their diagnosis.

Tara Clayton:

With the person-centered care you know, I've seen that not just in looking at providing quality of care for really residents in general, not just those living with dementia, but understanding some of the difficulties that can come with someone who is living with dementia. The importance of that person-centered care completely makes sense to me. To kind of get back to how I started the episode, we're in the midst of the holidays and you know this year I think it's fair to say that many communities are going to be welcoming a wider range of individuals during the holidays than we've seen in the last couple of years because of the pandemic.

And kind of understanding or hearing what you've talked about as it relates to person-centered care and the importance of that with residents with dementia. I'd like to talk, Shavaughn, with you, just some things that providers as well as even family members need to be thinking about as we kind of gear up and start ramping up our holiday activities inside of the communities. What are some things that providers, associates, even

family members need to be thinking of when they're engaging with residents with dementia to understand, are we approaching that person-centered care properly for this particular resident?

Shavaughn Carey:

Well, I think that is a bit of a two-part question, so if I can address them a little separately, I'll speak to the families first. The families will be visiting these different communities during the holidays. So in thinking about these visitations, I think it can be really helpful for families to be prepared for changes that they may notice in loved ones. And these changes can occur in a physical way, but they can also affect memory and personality. So being aware of that before your visit can really help center you with your expectations. Having a plan in place for how you intend to spend that time that you share during the visit can also be very helpful and having a willingness to adapt if needed.

Also, families can take things with them on their visit, like old pictures, favorite trinkets, puzzles, things that your loved one enjoys to help facilitate that engagement. And also while you're there, things might come up where you have questions about what you're seeing, what you're witnessing, maybe you need further understanding. So know that it's okay to ask staff questions about your loved one, but also recognize that it's a busy time and so that it may be necessary to request an appointment with staff for more involved detailed care planning concerns and questions. So those are some of the things that are really important for families to keep in mind. And then I can move on to the communities if you'd like.

Tara Clayton:

Yeah, no, that would be great. I think those are also great tips. I know they're directed to family members, but I think that's important for even staff members to know how, you know, the recommendations for family and things important for them. But what other recommendations do you guys have for staff members during the holiday season?

Shavaughn Carey:

So in regards to staff, one important thing to be aware of is changes and how those affect residents with dementia. Change can be challenging for some people with dementia. So with thinking about that, it can be helpful to be aware of the amount of changes that are

occurring and the frequency in which they are occurring, in an effort to keep the changes at a minimum. These changes can refer to the atmosphere and environment that the resident is accustomed to, but they can also refer to people. Residents get used to the people that they have regular interactions with and with the holidays, staff may go on vacation. There may also be the potential for temporary residents' departures for visiting their own families depending on the community and their rules and regulations. So all of these things can lead to the person living with dementia to have questions or be curious or looking for that person that they might have a strong connection with.

So knowing this and being prepared ahead of time to answer questions that might arise or to address things that you might see affecting the person, if you see them looking, but not necessarily identifying, that can be really helpful in working with the people who are living with dementia and just being proactive in monitoring for differences in behavior. So things like changing in eating habits. If you notice that the person hasn't eaten as frequently or an increase in memory concerns or isolation. Maybe you notice that the person isn't coming down for the regular activities in the same way that they used to or even resistance to engaging in routine activities. Those can all be signs that there may be a potential issue and something to look out for so that you can implement a strategy ahead of time.

Tara Clayton:

No, I think those are great things to be looking out for Shavaughn. And I think also your point about understanding there could be changes in staff during the holidays because several people use that time period for vacation. So new staff may be covering during the time period, new residents may be coming in for different respite type care. Right? So the surroundings for the established residents may be changing, and sometimes that can be difficult for certain residents who are dealing with dementia.

I would imagine too, you know, I know myself, I put up four different Christmas trees. I get very into holiday decorating, and I've seen a lot of our communities get really decked out for the different holidays, different events. Can that have an impact that something that associates and communities need to be thinking through is how even just decorations or activities that they're hosting during the time period could impact the residents?

Shavaughn Carey:

Absolutely. It certainly can. So when you are thinking about those types of differences, you want to keep the environment in mind. So with that focus, you want to try to encourage support independence while promoting safety. For example, if you're having all of these different decorations and things may look a little confusing or unclear for residents who live there, you want to ensure that the dining areas, activity rooms, and toileting locations are recognizable. You want to make sure that those things that are primarily used are easily accessible and have cues available where appropriate so that you can minimize confusion. And support that person's independence and being able to access those things that they would regularly seek out.

Tara Clayton:

That's very, I think, important to understand, Shavaughn. And that makes me think back to the earlier information you gave us on the concept of person-centered care. And, you know, you've given some examples already of things to look for, and the dining room I think was a great example of making sure that there's cues to help avoid confusion. What are some other suggestions that the Alzheimer's Association puts out as it relates to helping residents from a person-centered care standpoint during time periods where maybe things are a little more hectic than normal?

Shavaughn Carey:

So we did talk about some of the person-centered care approaches and wanting to start with the comprehensive assessment. So some considerations in addition to the assessment would be that upfront care planning, understanding behavior, and effective communication is really essential in that care planning process. You want to keep in mind that consistency and care approaches is really critical. For example, if a resident prefers to shower at a certain time of day, any staff member that may work with that resident should be aware of this preference in order to minimize potential for conflict. So if there is a crossover between staff members, that engagement is always clear no matter who's working with that person.

That's really keeping person-centered care approach at the heart of the situation. It's really also very important to establish those relationships. That staff and resident relation development and increasing staff knowledge

can really assist with fostering a person-centered care approach. It is really helpful to get to know the resident, their reality, creating meaningful engagement by forming those authentic caring connections and establishing that supportive community. And these things can be done in a variety of ways. It doesn't have to be so over the top. Something that can be very meaningful is just in passing, providing a compliment, really showing people that you see them and that you are interested in them and getting to know them and developing that trust and that connection.

Tara Clayton:

You mentioned the importance of getting that information to build that relationship with the resident, but I would imagine the family plays a pretty important role as well. And you had mentioned, you know like, with the holidays or even really any time of the year, right, when they're coming in to visit, thinking through things that would help provide quality engagement for the residents. So I just, you know, thoughts around how staff can interact with family members to kind of pull out some of that information as well?

Shavaughn Carey:

Absolutely. So when a person is transitioning into a community, you want to have those initial conversations. You want to gather all of those different components of a person within that assessment, the things that we talked about referring to cognitive health, behavioral status, those things that elicit understanding for the community that they are becoming a part of. You also want to be very mindful that even though you get this history and background and understanding from the family, change again can sometimes be a challenge. So you still want to establish a rapport and build a connection with that person within the first 24 to 48 hours of them being in the community.

So you have a baseline in order to see if changes do occur over time, those differences and be able to recognize them. So yes, the family is very, very much involved in the initial transition into that community in order to be able to get a foundation for what that person is like. Is this person someone who experiences this sundowning? And we should be aware of that so we know what's happening when we see it. So absolutely, they are essential in that process.

Tara Clayton:

Shavaughn, I want to highlight, too, a point that you made a minute ago, as you said, having these interactions to really truly get to know the resident as best as you can to create the quality of life and their new setting. You made the comment about even just giving a compliment and I wanted to make sure to stress that. I think there's a lot of thought around what are the big activities from a community setting that you can do with multiple residents? But I read in some of the material from the Alzheimer's Association, the comment you made about even just giving someone a compliment on their shirt that day, seeing them in the hallway helps make someone feel seen and really is truly a quality engagement for that individual resident. And I think that is super important in making people feel seen and heard from their particular perspective.

The other thing I wanted to ask about, Shavaughn, as you're building this communication with the residents and the family members and understanding for that particular resident, what would be quality engagement for them. What about how the communication is given? Is there anything that we need to think through from the way we express and communicate our tone of voice and when we talk with residents that you think we need to think through and talk about?

Shavaughn Carey:

That's a great question, Tara. Yes, it's very, very important. You want to use an even, calming tone when communicating with residents. And it's important to look them in the eye when communicating so that it's clear that we are having a conversation together. You're really treating that person as an individual and the center of your attention in that moment during that interaction. So it's very important to really try to stay connected to that calming and not elevate your voice and even be aware of facial expressions and body language because those are things that can be detected and picked up on and can pass off a negative energy with that resident. So just being very mindful of that is very helpful.

Tara Clayton:

Can you talk to us a little bit about, maybe you're having some trouble communicating with a resident, they're not cooperating, right, with a particular staff member and, you know, I've seen instances of where that's happened. What are some kind of tips that you have for

staff members when they're working with a resident who maybe is not doing what is in their best interest and the staff's trying to get them to do. What could be going on that staff need to be thinking about?

Shavaughn Carey:

You bring us back to the importance of that assessment, right, and having that on an ongoing basis. So your point about the stages is very, very important because depending on where they are in that process, it's going to help inform how you engage with that person. So if the person is seemingly being difficult, it might be taking a step back because we need to look at ourselves and see how are we presenting this request to the individual. And so we also may want to, in response to your question about what may be going on with this person, we want to think about is this normal behavior for this individual? Because if it's not and it's something that you see suddenly coming on, there may be a medical issue that is taking over leading to the response that the resident is giving. It could also be tapping out and calling on a colleague to come and try to engage with this person because maybe you two don't have the best rapport or the best connection in that moment.

And so that's okay to tap out and call on some support. It's also okay, depending on what's going on, to wait. If it's a situation where the person is not wanting to eat for that moment and it's just one meal, that's okay. We can maybe let it go, move on, and give them the opportunity to do have the meal later in the day, maybe skip lunch and have dinner.

So it's being mindful of adapting to situations, having the foresight to recognize that maybe there's a medical explanation for why the person is behaving the way that they are and also recognizing that maybe the person just really doesn't want to at that time and we have that right to say no. If it's something that's harmful, then we don't want to let it go or ignore it. But it might be a moment where we wait five or 10 minutes and come back. Maybe we redirect to an activity for a little bit and then try again. So you want to know that you can call for support, you can wait until later, you can try again, and you may want to reach out for a medical evaluation if it's something that's presenting suddenly.

Tara Clayton:

Thanks, Shavaughn. Jumping around a little bit here, but I want to get back to the holidays. We talked about

the person-centered care and you gave some great examples of some things that individuals can do related to the person-centered care approach. From a community standpoint, what are some different activities that particularly communities who have, you know, a larger population of residents with dementia, what are some activities that you've seen or the Alzheimer's Association have seen that have really been not necessarily person-centered, but they've, they're conducted in a way that each individual residents been able to enjoy or have some type of takeaway and participate in the activity? Do you have any examples?

Shavaughn Carey:

Sure. Music is one of the major things that really resonate with individuals living with dementia. Music is something that can take a person back to their childhood or really connect to fun and fond memories. So using music as a way to connect with people can be very, very resourceful. I think just in general, in talking about the person centered, when you have options, a little bit of a variety when possible, it's not always possible, but that can still be person centered and tailored to the individual because there are choices. And so that person can go to what they may like. Those things can include puzzles, arts and crafts, different games, even movie night. I'm a person who loves movies, so some people connect to different things in a more meaningful way.

So it's still going to be person centered when you are able to have variety. And that doesn't mean that you have variety every single day, even if there are different days, there are different activities. Those people who tend to prefer puzzles over music or crafts over games will still have those options. So thinking through that and how to set up the community when you have a large amount of people to where there's not such an individualistic activity where it's one on one, but there are options can be helpful.

Tara Clayton:

One of the things, Shavaughn, that you and I had talked about before, I like the idea of the listening centers. I personally love music and it does invoke a lot of different emotions depending on the particular song that pops up, right, and brings memories back. But I could also see where it could be, depending on the emotion that's being triggered for the individual, could be harmful, right, for certain individuals. So you had

mentioned, you know, you've seen listening centers in places, and I think that sounds like a great way where you can tailor it to an individual setting, but it's a broader, holistic community activity for everyone.

Well, Shavaughn, this has been extremely helpful, just highlighting some things critically important for families to be thinking through as they're going to start having the holiday visits, probably taking loved ones out for different holiday meals. But also some tips for providers to be thinking about as we prepare for the holiday hysteria that happens during this time of year. But I want to turn it back to you and just ask, is there any, any big takeaway message that you want to make sure that we cover before we wrap up?

Shavaughn Carey:

I think one thing that I would share is planning, patience, understanding, and adaptation. If possible you want to create a plan, get together a list of expectations for visitors that outline community guidelines. Provide this ahead of time, post it on the door. That includes things like mask requirements, visiting hours, number of visitors allowed at a time, thinking about those things that are within your control to avoid confusion, right. Also keeping in mind that when we're used to an environment that we're working in, we can sometimes forget that others may not be as versed in the nuances of our workplace. So you want to extend grace and exude patience. It can help everyone involved get their needs met.

I think also with consideration to understanding, it can be so many visitors' first time visiting a community or their loved ones first holiday in the community, so they can have a flood of emotions like anxiety, nervousness, sadness, or just be plumb exhausted, right. As well as the staff members within the communities because of the hustle and bustle of the holiday, really getting things ramped up and ready. So just having that understanding when interacting with visitors and residents alike can really help eliminate barriers to a successful visit. And just keeping in mind as much as we plan exactly how we intend for things to go, disruptions happen. So remember that it's okay, and be ready to adapt whenever necessary, I think are some key factors to keep in mind.

Tara Clayton:

That's fantastic, Shavaughn. And I think you hit the nail on the head, and I think pointing out having grace

during this time period on all sides, right. And I think it's important pointing out in any industry, but for sure this industry as well, we know what we do day in and day out, but that doesn't mean that other people know that as well. So understanding that everybody's coming to the table with some different perspectives and understanding. So fantastic takeaway, Shavaughn. I really appreciate you joining me on the podcast today. This has been super insightful for me. Thank you.

Shavaughn Carey:

It was a pleasure to be here. I appreciate you asking. Thank you so much.

Tara Clayton:

Of course. For our listeners, hopefully this has been helpful information but you can learn so much more about the offerings from the Alzheimer's Association, a ton of resources that they have for families as well as providers, more information on those dementia care practice recommendations that Shavaughn and I briefly mentioned earlier. You can find it on their website, which is linked in our show notes. And be sure you subscribe so you don't miss any future episodes. You can find us on your favorite podcast platforms, including Apple and Spotify. And as always, I would love to hear from you. If you have any topics you'd like addressed on the podcast, please email me your ideas at the email address provided in the show notes. As always, thank you so much for tuning in, and I hope you'll join us for our next *Risk Insight*.

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