

# No Greater Gift

This is National Nursing Home Week, which began Sunday, May 11, and continues through Saturday, May 17. Its theme is *Living the Aloha Spirit*. In Hawaiian culture, *aloha* has the significance of showing others love and respect and joyfully sharing life in order to create a better world.

Those virtues are contained in a letter sent to me recently by Richard E. Waltman, M.D., the on-site physician at Life Care Center of Puyallup, Washington. He has graciously allowed it to be reprinted as part of the observance of National Nursing Home Week.

## No Greater Gift

By Richard E. Waltman, M.D.

*When I started to work in skilled nursing, the patients were old, and I was by comparison young. Some reminded me of my grandparents, but I could take care of them with minimal emotional attachment.*

*As the years passed, and as my own parents aged, my SNF patients often made me think of them, engendering a sense of closeness and relationship that sometimes challenged my objectivity and comfort. I began to like my SNF patients more, care about them more, and miss them more when they were gone.*

*But today, a sunny Sunday, I saw some patients at Life Care Center of Puyallup who are my age, and several who are younger. That reality evoked other feelings – sadness for them that they are ill and in a facility, and profound gratitude and humility that I am not.*

*Yesterday, I spent the afternoon with my sons, with my wife, with my daughter-in-law, and yes, most of all, with my grandson Eli. Every moment I spend with him is a treasure and a blessing, and I am deeply thankful for that privilege.*

*Someone recently asked me if I know how lucky I am to have a grandchild and to have him so close to me. Yes, I told her. I most certainly do.*

*Working today, I feel sadness and empathy for my patients confined to a bed or a room and experience an overwhelming sense of grace and thankfulness to have the privilege of taking care of those less fortunate than myself, to bring them good medical care, to improve their lives, if just a little, and to give them moments of vitality and joy.*

(more)

*I take their hands. I say hello. I make eye contact. I show them I care about them. As I told the student working with me today, "Sometimes a smile and a minute of your time works far better than a pill."*

*I am forever grateful for Eli and for my family, but I am equally and eternally grateful for the opportunity of taking care of my SNF patients. There is no greater gift.*

Dr. Waltman's letter captures the sentiments of most of us who choose long-term care as a profession, no matter what the calling – as a certified nursing assistant or an associate in activities, housekeeping, dietary, etc. It is a noble calling, and, as he said, a gift.

– Beecher Hunter

