

MHLP: Confessions on the Dance Floor

The first thing to say is that there might be grammatical or spelling mistakes here. I am just a girl from Madrid, but most of all, I am a human, and humans make mistakes. In my job interviews, people ask me about what MHLP fits in the real world. Following the program syllabus, here is what I learnt after two years “mastering” health leadership and policy in senior care. I hope it helps.

1st term:

- Special Topics in Nursing: being old and live alone is risky. You will need a **caregiver**. They are the front line, the real first responders. However, they get probably less than half of what it is paid, less even than a housekeeper, so keeping optimal motivational levels is unsustainable.
- Social Epidemiology: Dementia is the most dramatic neurological disease that I ever faced, because you have to help people that are losing the mind piece by piece. And the only way to take care of them is by giving **love**. A surgical love that uses words as colourful lasers to repair these broken and complex brain networks, while creating new one's thorough neuroplasticity.
- Organizational Leadership: It is all about power and resistance. **Friendship** is more helpful and constructive. **Loyalty, Privacy, and Respect** are assets.
- Management and Leadership: **Communication and Vibration** is everything. As simplex and complex as **The Human Touch**. As fascinating as working with engineers.

2nd term:

- Organizational Considerations: Learn to write loans because the **quality** is expensive.
- Research and Evidence-Based Practice: **music therapy, animal therapy, yoga**, and gardening works. Healthy food means healthy senior. At the end of the day, it is all about the **nutrition** of the body, the mind and the soul.
- Businesses Acumen for Technical Leaders: health is not a business. **Health is a human right**. Invest in Human resources. The good business ends when the win-win situation finishes.

3rd term:

- Health Policy: everything is in the book **Responsibility for Justice** – Iris Marion Young (Oxford, 2011)
- Strategy and Innovation: the worst strategy is to think that robots are the best option to change seniors' diapers.
- Sustainability: it is highly energetically demanding, but it is worthy.
- Social and Environmental Planning to Foster Health of Populations: everybody needs a sacred space to feel **secure** and protected.

Final Note: I don't have enough data to talk about facilities.

The Human Touch: The Latest Skill

Last year, I went to my first Company Christmas dinner. I was sitting in front of the best caregiver, not because of her certificates and diplomas, nor for her awards. The recognition came from the other members of the company: she was the best. She works many hours and many days with a lady with severe dementia, and they both enjoy every moment. I wanted to know how she made it. What was the magic recipe, so I asked. "Love & Respect," she said. "No more, no less." The simplicity of her answer still fascinates me. After a Master's Degree in Senior Care, I could not believe that the solution was so simple, maybe too much for a world that believes that machines will be better at caring than humans. Humans need humans that treat them with humanity. Everyone wants love and respect: seniors, their loved ones, and the professionals that work with them. I made this simple principle the core of my assistance, and I use it in every task that I performance in senior care. Like a tree, the human touch is the tree trunk that supports and nourish every branch, no matter how different are. There is nothing new in this model, just the essence of the human being, in the form of protocol for senior care at home. For many seniors, stay at home is the last thing that gives them a sense of having control of their lives, the feeling that they still have some freedom.

The protocol includes the routinary steps as follows:

- Stablish regular but flexible schedules: wake up between 8:30 to 9:30. They might ask for five more minutes after the first wake up call. Please, allow it. Even a second one. It may define the mood for the rest of the day. Get into the room, and with kindness, let the senior know that the day is starting.
- Shower: two times a week would be enough. It is not always a pleasant moment. Don't talk too much about it, act as it is a part of the morning routine, and please do not judge them. They have reasons like pain in the joints, changes in the body temperature during the process, fear from fall or shame for being naked in the hands of a stranger. Try to be fast but gentle and tell them how well they are doing. Giving a hug while covering the body with the towel offers comfort and a feeling of protection.
- Clothes: prepare the clothes in advance and offer two convenient options. Please give them a chance to participate and respect their choice.
- Food: from my experience, this is the most challenging area. Foods that they liked before, they don't like it anymore. Cooking for themselves can be risky. Food expires and stays in the fridge and kitchen cabinets. It is hard for them to remember medical dietary restrictions. Meal schedules disappear, especially when they live alone. The key here is simplifying. Firstly, throw away all the food that is expired, and put the available food altogether in just a couple of cabinets that are accessible for them. Drinking is more comfortable than chewing. Smoothies and hot creams offer an excellent opportunity to include several ingredients with proteins, carbohydrates and fats. Small amounts every hour works better than big meals.

- Phone calls: at least once a day. Some of them like calling, some others like to answer the phone. Talking makes us feel that we have something to say, that we are significant, that there is someone else that cares about what we say. Even when the conversation has no sense. The seniors that we caring, grew with the phone technology in the very fundamental way, they are not millennials, and they did not grow in the era of the cell phones and the internet. Phone calls are the most effective and most straightforward way to maintain their communication skills.

- Walk outside: how long or how much is not relevant, and varies a lot. The idea is to at least, go for a walk outside once a day. It may be one hour in a park, go to the garden to water the plants or go to the recycling room to empty the garbage. By changing the scenario, the mind refreshes as well, and with the movement, we reinforce the idea of self-control.

- Music: rather than TV or radio news. Music is the last language that we lose. It makes us feel, and feelings are what make us humans. Feelings and emotions are what makes us live and connect with the part of ourselves that might be not able to show up in any other way. It is also directly related to movement. Dance, clap hands or sing can be the best physical exercise and relatively easy become a routine if you can discover their music preferences. As my yoga teacher says: "move your body the way you want to, while you still can. Move for the joy of it. Move, because you can..."

- Be surrounded by life: life grows with life. It includes plants, animals, and other human beings. Let them touch the plants, the flowers, the pets, the people they meet. Shake their hand when you say hello and goodbye. Please help them to take care of a pet. Ask them to remove the brown leaves of the plants, or check if there is dust in the leaves. Touching life connects us with reality and the present.

- Please participate in the recreational activities with them: perform the activity with them, and share it showing genuine interest. Think as the funniest thing that can happen to you right now, no matter if you are colouring a mandala or doing a puzzle. It is not about performing an activity; it is about playing together.

- Be sincere: if you don't know what to say, don't say anything. If you don't know the answer, say, "Sorry, I don't know the answer." If you don't know what to do, just be kind. Look at the eyes and smile.