

Reflections of TCC Interns

Huili Zhu

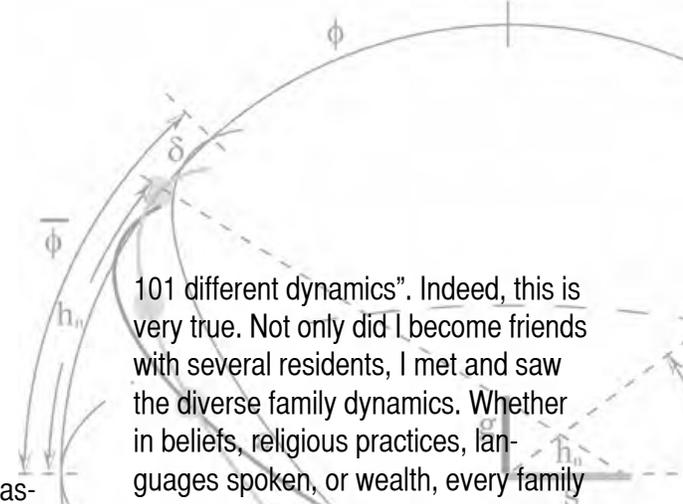
There are 729 beds in Terence Cardinal Cooke (TCC) Health Care Center, and each resident who lives there have come to call TCC home. After 10 weeks of close interaction with doctors, nurses, administrative workers, social workers, and more importantly, the residents, I felt at ease and at home in TCC. My internship this past summer with the Columbia Earth Institute's Center for the Study of Science and Religion, along with my partner Ashley Shaw, taught me more than just the field of palliative care; it taught me a side of life that is often neglected by most people. There is a lot of emphasis on beginnings of life and the glorious process; however, there are often many taboos and stigmas associated with the end of life. Through my internship, I learned that palliative and end-of-life care provide relief and comfort for residents of TCC and their family members. Thus, we should not be scared or uncertain of the end. By learning about the details of palliative care, I was better prepared for the daily occurrences at the nursing home.



Huili Zhu

often many taboos and stigmas associated with the end of life. Through my internship, I learned that palliative and end-of-life care provide relief and comfort for residents of TCC and their family members. Thus, we should not be scared or uncertain of the end. By learning about the details of palliative care, I was better prepared for the daily occurrences at the nursing home.

By visiting and spending time with various residents daily, I had a chance to interact with them and listen to their stories. Everyone at TCC had a unique personality. Their experiences, travels, environments, and backgrounds have culminated in the people they are today. I am very fortunate to have had the chance of meeting these amazing individuals and listen to the stories they share. One doctor who works at TCC once said, "If there are 100 families in this nursing home, there are at least



101 different dynamics". Indeed, this is very true. Not only did I become friends with several residents, I met and saw the diverse family dynamics. Whether in beliefs, religious practices, languages spoken, or wealth, every family was different. It was very important to recognize these differences amongst the families because they determined how a particular resident's palliative care was to carry out. Because many families do not fully understand the details of end-of-life care procedures, as an intern, I attempted to improve the system by enlisting a new method of family education of palliative care.

Learning about palliative care is really only the surface of this internship. I learned more about myself. I discovered hidden emotions and feelings. I challenged myself in the face of death. I, a resident on Columbia campus, was able to make new friends with residents of TCC nursing home. I am very thankful for the opportunity to become a member of the TCC community. And with confidence I can say I left TCC having left a lasting impact.

Raphy Rosen

One of the difficulties faced by an undergraduate premedical student is that there are very few valuable learning opportunities in a clinical setting for the simple reason that an undergraduate cannot meaningfully contribute in any clinical way. Or so I thought.



Raphy Rosen

The TCC-CSSR fellowship gave me an opportunity to have deeply moving and deeply impactful interactions every day with every type of patient in the hospital. I spoke with and learned from residents suffering from HIV/AIDS, Hun

-tington's Disease, kidney failure, stroke and other chronic ailments. The focus of my research was on the role of a CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant) in providing care to palliative patients. We looked at whether the amount of knowledge that a CNA possessed about the residents affected the way that he or she cared about the patients. I was also exposed to outstanding physicians, particularly Dr. Anthony Lechich, whom I hope to emulate as I progress in my medical career.

Rachel Shenkel & Eileen Yung

This summer, due to the generous support of the CSSR, Eileen Yung and I had the privilege of interning at Terence Cardinal Cooke Healthcare Center, a skilled nursing facility in East Harlem. I cannot say that I anticipated the ways my experiences working at TCC would ultimately contribute to my view of the world and to my development as a person. This experience forced me to look in the face things that our society tries to ignore: old age, suffering and death. At times the repeated reminders of these realities was overwhelming, but the tangible presence of these painful truths also created opportunities for me to see beautiful aspects of the human experience that we similarly rarely encounter: namely, unconditional love and care as well as deep and profound peace in the face of fearful situations.

During our time at TCC Eileen and I had the opportunity to experience nearly every aspect of the services that Terence Cardinal Cooke Healthcare Center provides. We worked with the team of priests and ministers who comprise the pastoral care team to provide love and support to patients who were nearing the end of their lives. We facilitated discussions about overcoming addiction in association with the Substance Abuse Recovery Program. We interviewed CNAs, nurses, and doctors about the challenges they face in attempting to optimize quality of life in both the Huntington's Disease Unit and the HIV/AIDS Unit. However the most valuable experiences were the moments we spent simply cultivating relationships with the patients.

As interns we were free to take the time to simply get to know the residents in a way in which doctors rarely have opportunity. Similarly inspiring was our work directly alongside the Medical Director of TCC, Dr. Anthony Lechich, who patiently guided us through the process of compiling our final papers and graciously allowed us to run alongside him through the halls of the facility as he checked on the most urgent cases of the over five hundred residents he oversees—nearly all of whom he knows by name.

I emerge from this life-changing experience unable to fully express the admiration I have for the individuals who devote their lives to the patients residing at TCC. It was truly an honor to witness their examples of selflessness and self-sacrifice. I can only hope that when I join the ranks of health care providers I will be able to contribute with their level of skill and patience not only to the health, but also to the quality of life of my patients.



Ashley Shaw, Rachel Shenkel, Eileen Yung



<http://thecssr.wordpress.com/>