

# **River Garden Hebrew Home for the Aged**

## **Gold Seal Panel Site Visit**

**November 17, 2022**

*Submitted by Robert Snyder, MPH, Health Officer DOH-Flagler and Panel member*

### **Introductory Meeting**

I was greeted by Mauri Mizrahi, LNHA, PT, Chief Executive Officer, Bobbie Jo Mentz, LHNA, MPT, Chief Operating Officer, Sheri Samuels, Administrative Assistant, Bernadeth Palompo, BSN, RN, Director of Nursing, and Martin Goetz, MS, MPS, CEO Emeritus.

River Garden is a 180 bed, 5 star short- and long-term care facility seeking its 10th Gold Seal recognition. The facility is in the upper 9<sup>th</sup> percentile of skilled nursing facilities and has been identified as one of the best in the nation by the US News and World Report and Newsweek. It is a 2022 recipient of the Joint Commission Gold Seal of Approval.

River Garden Senior Services is a mission driven, non-profit agency sponsored by the Jacksonville Jewish community and located in a beautiful 40 acre, scenic, well landscaped setting along a river providing serene and peaceful outdoor views. Services are numerous, including long term skilled nursing care, short stay rehabilitation, memory care, adult day care, home health, outpatient therapies, full time medical staff (1 FTE physician and 2 FTE ARNP's) and The Coves Independent Living. The indoor space is welcoming, comfortable, spacious and one gets the feeling of being at 'home'. The facility is very clean, well-kept and maintained. Kudos to the environmental and facility engineering staff. On my tour, I noticed how personal the resident rooms are with plenty of availability to outdoor spaces, beautiful gardens, views of the river and nature, several indoor sitting and multipurpose alcove areas, community room and lovely chapel.

My first task was to receive an update on the Nursing Home Guide's Quality of Care component from an April 2021 report that showed a 3-star rating. In June 2021, River Garden responded to the deficiency that was deemed corrected. The issue dealt with a resident who increased their oxygen flow. The nursing supervisor and staff participated in educational in-services regarding the proper use of O2 concentrators, importance of accurate documentation and daily audits reported to the Quality Assurance/Performance Improvement Committee to ensure compliance. One other issue involved food procurement and proper donning of gloves by a staff member. This deficiency was successfully corrected through education, competency reviews and audits as well.

### **Consumer Satisfaction**

The ongoing consumer satisfaction survey results are impressive. Ninety-seven percent (97%) of respondents would recommend River Garden to friends and family. The rating of staff, cleanliness and several other indicators were also in the high 90's. The only indicator that was rated lower than others involved food and dining. When I inquired about this, leadership pointed out the impacts of COVID 19

and inability for residents to enjoy visits by family members to dine out and visit. The Resident Council provides ample opportunity for folks to provide input about food offerings and quality. Also, the deli, which is very popular, has now re-opened.

## **Community and Family Involvement**

During the opening interview with Marty, Bobby Jo, and Mauri, we discussed at great length River Garden's response to COVID and impact on residents. Indeed, this was a challenging time. I was very impressed to hear that 97% of residents and 100% of staff were vaccinated. This resulted in limiting the transmission of the virus. Restrictions were in place for visitors, volunteers and family members, which was hard on residents, but staff endeavored to accommodate and keep spirits up. For instance, to ensure a resident's attendance at her granddaughter's wedding, River Garden arranged for the religious service and celebration to occur at the facility. It was to take place at the outdoor gazebo area but at the last minute was moved inside due to inclement weather. This is an example of going above and beyond for the resident and her family.

During COVID, census did decrease, short stay services were suspended to protect the long-term residents and work force shortages were experienced. Financially, the facility depended on available governmental assistance and philanthropy through the robust and active Foundation. Management kept a daily COVID diary going to document protocol changes, CDC and State guidance, changes to screening protocol and visitation policy. This was an awesome example of good and historical documentation of River Garden's response to keep COVID contained in protecting the vulnerable residents safe. The many actions taken by leadership to address infection control and implement appropriate restrictions were impressive and effective. To accommodate a grandmother to attend her granddaughter's wedding, the staff arranged for the wedding to take place at River Garden. What a wonderful, caring and compassionate gesture.

River Garden's Board is comprised of 35 committed individuals. In March 2022, the River Garden Anniversary Day and community festival took place once again. Over 500 people attended the festival including many residents, their families, staff and their families and the public. It sounded like a grand time was experienced by all. Other notable activities focused on community and family included coordination of outside 'porch visits' by loved ones during COVID, seminars regarding advance care planning, an Alzheimer's support group, and adult and teen volunteer program, professional educational programs with FSU, U of NF and Florida State College, several celebrations of Jewish High Holidays, Thanksgiving Day dining for residents and families and a Remembrance Circle for those who have passed away.

## **Stable Workforce/Recruitment and Retention**

Management recognizes that having a stable staff is the most important determinant of excellent resident care. Indicators related to turnover and stability per Gold Seal Panel targets were exceeded and at acceptable levels. Recruitment efforts include monthly mail outs to area nurses and CNA's, social media, incentives for staff referrals, job and college career fairs. Retention efforts include emphasis on the first 100 days of employment, 'Team Talks', leadership trainings, recent pay increases and consistent rounding by managers.

During my tour of the facility, I spoke to several staff, including nurses, CHA's, supervisors and environmental staff. All had positive comments about the working environment, appreciation and dedication to their jobs, care and compassion for the residents. They emphasized the 'family like' atmosphere at River Garden, how nice co-workers are, the safe working environment, opportunities for growth, the excellent orientation and training programs, patience and kindness exhibited by management, and the focus on teamwork. While shift change was occurring, I spoke to 3 nurses, with 21 years, 5 years and 2 years of service, respectively. They commented that River Garden provides 'a high level of care', is a 'nice place to work', 'feels like family', 'staff work tightly and closely', 'patients are the bottom line', that there is 'an expectation of excellence' and that staff get 'upset if goals are not met'.

I was reminded by Marty Goetz that staff are provided meals at no cost while working. This decision was made a few years ago, when as administrator, he noticed how some staff would eat leftovers from resident trays and out of compassion and concern, the new policy to support employees began and continues to this day. To me, this is an amazing show of empathy and focus on the employee.

## **Targeted In-Service**

The Home's education department is under the full-time direction of an RN educator. The educational calendar is full and comprehensive covering important routine topics and remedial as well to address issues identified by the QAPI committee and inspections by regulatory entities. I received positive feedback about orientation and on boarding of new employees, daily clinical meetings and debriefs for staff, T.R.U.C.E. (Topic, Review, Update, Comments, etc.....) unit-based sessions and robust 2022 required coursework, continuing education of all staff.

## **Best Practices**

There are many examples of best practice at River Garden starting with the facility and outdoor surroundings. Historically, the Board and leadership have stressed the importance of a residential homelike personalized environment in which social, intimate spaces are prominent and medical settings are in the background. There is a progression of social space from the privacy of the resident's room, to many parlor like sitting areas, to local unit hub multipurpose spaces to larger 'downtown' common spaces that are more public such as the auditorium, café, activities center, gift shop and welcoming entrance and lobby areas. Again, the interior design, wall and corridor décor, lighting, numerous and varied artwork, wall hangings, including an art gallery all add to the warm and classy ambiance of the building.

My list of other best practices that I read from the Gold Seal application and observed during my visit and tour is long. The ones that stood out include the faith based foundation and beginnings of River Garden and openness to all faiths, the Home's response to and management of COVID 19, the respect shown to employees and love exhibited for the residents, the full time medical staff associated with Baptist Health, the Day Care respite program, the therapy department and huge gym, all the amenities, the dedication of the nursing staff and support departments, pain management, palliative care and end of life programs, the Eldergrow program to bring mother nature indoors, volunteer programs, employee skills fair, music and aromatherapy programs, community partnerships and interaction with the Jacksonville Jewish community. The philanthropic support through the Foundation is impressive.

During the tour, I did speak to a few residents. They had only positive things to share about River Garden. The common theme from their remarks was living in a friendly, home-like, family environment with services provided by a caring, dedicated, and compassionate staff. While on our walk, Mauri and Bobby Jo knew all the residents by name, which indicated to me that they round with a purpose and likewise care deeply about the special individuals they serve.

In summary, I have no hesitation in recommending a 10<sup>th</sup> Governor's Gold Seal recognition to the River Garden Hebrew Home for the Aged. I have personally referred River Garden to folks in my community who have sought short term rehabilitation or long-term placement for their loved ones.