

Elect to Promote and Vote: Voting and Election Day Activities in Healthcare Facilities

By Kimberly Grandal BA, CTRS, ACC
Executive Director, Re-Creative Resources Inc.



With Election Day 2008 just around the corner, it is important for facilities to provide opportunity for residents to vote. This is portrayed as one of the most crucial election years of our time and we must remember that our seniors and residents have the constitutional right to exercise their voting privileges.

Many residents should be brought to the polls and special arrangements for transportation may have to be made. Be sure to utilize all possible sources of transportation such as family members, volunteers, county vehicles, ambulance services, facility buses, etc. Voting should be taken seriously and it is the responsibility of the entire facility to make it happen.

For those residents who cannot go to the polls to vote, they still have the right to vote by absentee ballot. Each individual that chooses to vote via an absentee ballot must complete an absentee ballot request application of some kind. He/she will then receive their absentee ballot and can vote for their candidates and mail in the completed ballot. The process and time constraints for voting this method vary from state to state. There are a variety of forms, deadlines and instructions, so be sure to investigate this carefully for each resident who chooses to vote with an absentee ballot. For a simplified way to obtain this information and absentee ballot applications, visit www.govoteabsentee.org/vasteptwo.php?s=44&r=3757. It is necessary to know where the resident is registered to vote as well as the zip code.

Educating the residents about the upcoming election, the candidates and the issues is equally important. Activity Professionals should be incorporating election-related activities into the program. There are many types of activities that may be offered such as:

- Election Current Events-start off each day off with a brief review of the election headlines
- Election Trivia-you can find a lot of trivia online related to past elections, presidents, etc.
- Elections of the Past-discuss prior elections, who won, what were the issues, etc.
- Election Word Puzzles-crossword puzzles, word searches, hangman, etc.
- Mock Election-Create a ballot box and place it in a prime location in the facility. Invite residents, staff, volunteers and family members to cast their vote. Tally the vote and

announce the mock winner. Note: this shouldn't replace offering the residents the opportunity to legally vote. A Mock Election Ballot is available in the Re-Creative Resources Activity Resource Center.

- Debates-Set up debate teams with several residents debating the current governmental issues. Have residents that represent both political parties and even a 3rd party independent, if warranted.
- Election Day Crafts-have residents make the Mock Election Ballot Box, promotional signs that can be used during the debate, election scrapbook, flags, buttons, hats, and patriotic crafts.
- Election Scavenger Hunt-have residents cut out campaign-related articles, photos, headlines etc. and paste onto poster boards or tri-fold displays. These can then be placed throughout the facility to educate others about the election, the candidates and the issues at hand.
- Meet the Candidates-obtain a brief bio about each major candidate and share with residents. The presidential candidates are John McCain (Republican) and Barack Obama (Democrat). The Vice President Candidates are: Sarah Palin (Republican) and Joe Biden (Democrat). For complete bios, visit the campaign websites at www.johnmccain.com and www.barackobama.com.
- Create an election bulletin board in a prominent location of the facility
- Election Day Quotes-there are many quotes available online. Simply search Election Day Quotes and print your findings. Quotes are great conversation starters.
- Plan and facilitate party conventions. Have residents give campaign speeches.
- Daily Announcement-each morning announce something related to the election such as breaking news, issues, a quote, etc.
- Presidential Qualities-have residents discuss what they look for in a presidential candidate.
- Invite local politicians to come in and speak to the residents regarding local issues.
- Issue at Hand-Educate the residents about the issues and the various views of the presidential candidates. Some of the main issues are: Abortion, Afghanistan, Cuba, Economic stimulus, Education, Energy, Environment, Free Trade, Health Care, Homeland Security, Housing, Immigration, Iran, Iraq, Israel, LGBT issues, Social Security, Stem Cell Research, Taxes. Visit www.cnn.com for a great overview of the issues and the candidates' views.

In summary, voting is a constitutional right as well as a resident right. It is likely that facility surveyors may be looking closely at voting this year due to this important upcoming election so be prepared to show all records, policies, activities, etc. related to voting. It is also recommended that you address voting in the comprehensive care plan, progress notes, assessments, etc. If a resident declines voting or shows no interest in voting, be sure to document that. For those residents who are interested in voting,

document all attempts to provide transportation to the polls or to obtain absentee ballots. Lastly, don't forget to cast your vote as well. You will find that by educating the residents on the issues, you will be better prepared to make an informed decision at the polls this year!

The Re-Creative Resources Activity Resource Center has over 180 downloadable resources and tools including a variety of Election Day Activities such as word scrambles, crossword puzzles, word searches, trivia, mock election ballot, meet the candidate form, travel club, and more. Visit www.recreativeresources.com to register today.