

Taking Care--Documenting the Occupational Culture of Home Care Workers
Archie Green Fellows Project, 2014-2015
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Archive of Folk Culture, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

**Michael Ryan Hohman interview, 2014-10-29 : interview conducted by
Michael Robert Bussel and Sonia De La Cruz**

INTERVIEW LOG

00:00:30: Ryan Hohman lives in Cottage Grove, Oregon, two years as home care worker. Has three clients, one with spinal cord injury, medication management for two other clients.

00:01:24: Took community college classes after being out of work, got job in home care right out of school.

00:02:09: Some clients have more intensive needs than others. Wait for things to do in some cases. Has household chores as well as down time.

00:03:21: Special skills: patience, desire to help, find client that fits your personality. Key is not to take things personally.

00:05:36: Medication management. Get list, ensure medications are accurate, ensure people take prescribed dosage.

00:06:26: Skills learned in school, clinicals in service meetings through employers, COMPASS program provides opportunities to interact with other home care workers. Tend to work in isolation, cut off from other workers. These meetings are good places to learn and find out about common problems.

00:08:15: Typical day: client goes to gym. Do laundry, housecleaning, other household chores. For other clients, manage pillboxes.

00:09:47: Relationships with clients and their families. Become family, build rapport, client confides in him, fill gap for people.

00:12:15: Caregivers use certain acronyms, see things regular people don't see, must be careful about confidentiality.

00:13:26: Talks about getting clients to do things they might not want to do. Client must have freedom and independence to make decisions...can't be forced to do things. Caregivers brainstorm ideas about care when they come together.

00:15:55: Offers "soft, gentle" comments when giving advice regarding client behavior. Nudges people in right direction.

00:18:01: Humor within nature of profession of home care. Easier with young client who is not likely to pass away. Must deal with things that you weigh on you physically, emotionally, mentally. See people in pain. Humor is way to survive in job.

00:19:53: Waiting around is challenge. Likes to be busy. Most gratifying part of job is seeing people improve. Has seen improvement with full-time client who is in better place emotionally. Improvement less likely with elderly clients.

00:21:28: Role of union. Union makes a difference regarding fair pay. Has progressed from being delegate to General Council to work in educating members, encouraging others to get involved in the union.

00:24:17: Union is a tool for better employment conditions, pay, benefits. Must utilize it. Union gives him focus while he is waiting on the job. Redirects energy into something positive. Union provides connections to other home care workers and opportunities to socialize.

00:26:57: Benefit of being male. Male workers often prefer male caregivers. Men in demand. Not a lot of us. No one looks down on him as male in largely female industry.

00:29:12: How you "fit in" with client is based on your personality. Nothing in common--not a good fit with client.

00:30:13: Talk with client based on what may be on television, radio. Sometimes not much conversation with client. Depends on extent to which caregiver shares similar beliefs with client. Makes it easier to talk about things.

00:31:33: What people don't know about home care: "Nothing like you think it is, a little like what you think it is." Like being a "secret agent." Things you can't talk about.

00:32:28: Misconceptions. People think you sit around all day. Disturbed by perception of people who don't understand the work.

00:34:23: Activities away from work: Enjoy summer, riding bike, writing music, playing guitar, recording, video games, woodworking.

00:35:20: People should know that home care workers are underpaid and workers at facilities are often short-staff, must care for lots of clients, hard to retain people under these conditions. They have it rough.

00:37:17: If you become ill, independence is a huge thing. Might have “exit strategy” when he becomes older.

00:39:06: End of interview.