



# *Conscious Care Systems*

*Compassionate Living for All*

## **Darwin vs. Compassion - Facing the Disturbing Truth**

Science has revealed many startling facts about the origins and pathways of life and the physical world. A particular area of research exposes archetypal instincts that surely influence aspects of caregiving and attitudes toward elder and challenged individuals. Although the tendencies to be discussed may be - must be - seen as unfortunate; once recognized and brought to light, such human/Darwinian tendencies may well be mitigated and even corrected.

It now appears that most species have instinctual preferences for standards of strength, physical form and/or appearance. Symmetry and vigor are categories that often factor into pair-bonding qualifications. In addition, it is now known that the young of certain species have evolved many characteristics that tend to make mature adults want to protect and care about/for and even love them. In certain mammals these may include large eyes and sweet non-threatening faces, submissive, playful and winning ways, high pitched, imploring voices, beseeching behaviors and more. Many of these characteristics – I’m not making this up – may have evolved into some of the traits often considered to be desirable in women. Women successful in maintaining the protection of strong males in ancient times were those who most often survived to procreate.\* So what has all this to do with providing the highest quality care delivery? A lot perhaps.

Adult individuals who become compromised by virtue of age or impairment have usually lost the endearing characteristics and physical make-up that evolution has provided to safeguard the continuation of the species. Many animals will, perhaps must, abandon their own kind when they become ill, injured or aged. Although humans are capable of compassion and sacrifice for others, especially family; we may also retain some instincts that cause us to want, or even feel the need, to turn away from those who are frail or challenged, especially if their physical appearance or behavior is disturbing. Disfiguring characteristics and personality shifts are particularly difficult conditions for caregivers (even for many family members) to get beyond. These archetypal tendencies may help to explain the many families who rarely visit or interact with loved ones who become institutionalized or homebound.

Even so, it is usually much easier for family members to provide intimate care to their loved ones than to do so for someone they don’t know, or for hire. Why? Strong emotional connections, past history and memories, cultural and religious tenets of obligation, bloodlines and familiarity all help to dispel the discomfort or even aversion many people feel, particularly toward certain aspects of caregiving.

\* “...the extension of childlike characteristics into adulthood [is] an evolutionary process. Women have higher, more childlike voices and smoother, more finely boned baby faces, traits that Morris maintains evolved to elicit protective responses in their male mates.” - Helen Fisher      Book review: "***The Naked Woman: A Study of the Female Body***", by Zoologist Desmond Morris

So how can we mentor and inspire caregiver employees, motivating them to render their services freely and without the resentment and rancor that often exists? First of all, we must humanize the client and to the extent possible, invite the caregiver into the warmth of the client's loving family. Especially in the beginning of employee assignments, long-term care (LTC) coordinators may encourage and assist families to familiarize the caregiver(s) with the client and his or her past. This can be done through photos, videos, scrapbooks, music, conversations with and about the client's life, career, hobbies, contributions to society, family and friends, and anything else that might spark connections. Even if the personality of the client is no longer apparent or vital, it is *vital* that the caregiver have a sense of who that person is – and was. This is especially important in cases where someone has become belligerent and uncooperative due to various disease processes, most commonly, dementia. Respect, caring and even love may come to be the operating feelings present in an individual who has been enlightened about the true person under his or her care.

The caregivers too must feel respected and cared for, and will ideally come to understand the importance of their work. LTSS (Long-term Services & Supports) employers are, of course, central to creating the environment and protocols for this kind of mentoring. CCS has developed specific programs (home & community and facility-based) designed to inspire caregivers, clients and families alike, while providing instruction, guidance, counseling and support systems to those responsible for the day-to-day care of frail or challenged persons. Conscious Care will also license the use of educational and inspirational materials such as the numerous "Spirit in the Workplace" and self-transformation programs that are today available, affordable, varied and socially acceptable. CCS will recommend, and provide access to, local and national consultants, instructors, and online programming, geared to personal and professional improvement programs; and certain LTSS employees will be CCS-trained to effectively provide, promote and publicize such programming, whether on-site or off.

Many LTSS clients, families, volunteers and other local residents may also benefit from exposure to such engaging programs and mentors. There are very numerous books, TV and movie specials, and online resources offered by transformation "gurus" such as: the Dalai Lama, Pope Francis, Amma (the Hugging Saint), Paramahans Yogananda, MindValley/Silva, Brene Brown, Wayne Dyer, Jack Canfield, Dale Carnegie, Steven Covey, Deepak Chopra, Jon Kabat-Zinn, Eckhart Tolle, Napoleon Hill, Paulo Coelho, Thich Nhat Hanh, Richard Carlson, Malala Yousafzai, and many, many others. It is important to be sensitive to each individual's proclivities, and even belief systems, in order to maximize benefits and minimize any discordant philosophies or perspectives. (Even individual families may provide caregivers access to, and incentives to, avail themselves of such materials and training, such as paid attendance at workshops and lectures, etc. Families may also show their appreciation and concern for caregivers in many often very simple ways, that will significantly impact the level of concern that they then feel toward - and care they give to - their loved ones.)

Those individuals who are exposed to and trained to realize the deeper levels of compassion from a humanistic point of view, and for those inclined, a spiritual or philosophical viewpoint, will emerge much richer by far from their caregiving experience. That this compassion can be fostered is indisputable and should be implicit in the training and empowerment of individuals who provide the honorable and, for spiritually-oriented persons, even sacred service to the most vulnerable among us. The Biblical washing of the feet so often comes to mind in the process of caring for others, as surely was the intent of this parable, and of the very life of Christ - and of the many saints and sages from every spiritual tradition. Marie Eisele