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In a solarium lined with sheer curtains and permeated with the scent of lavender and sound of gentle music, a certified nursing assistant strokes the hand of 109-year-old Etta Kissack.

The CNA, Nalva Hashimoto, will make her way in due time to each of her seven charges in the room, tucking in fleecy blankets, soaking hands and feet in warm water, administering gentle head and hand massages and dispensing cups of water and lollipops.

This is a namaste (nā-ma-stay) room at EPOCH Senior Living of Brewster, and staffers say it brings even the most incapacitated residents back into the life stream of the nursing home and fills their hours with attentive care.

Namaste is a Hindu expression for "honoring the spirit within," according to consultant Joyce Simard, a veteran elder-care social worker. She founded the namaste program now used in all eight EPOCH living centers in Massachusetts as well as the one in Rhode Island.

Simard was concerned over the fate of residents too frail or disoriented to participate in the games, singalongs and other social events of nursing homes.

Often they would sleep away the days in their rooms or slump in their wheelchairs around the nurses' station, where staff could keep an eye on them.

"That's not quality of life. What they really need is someone to touch them in a loving way," Simard says. "People need to be loved and connected. That's the basis of this whole program.

"If they're going to nap anyway, why not have them nap in a room with people around. At least they can hear voices," Simard says.

The namaste program involves having a dedicated room and specially trained staff.

EPOCH in Brewster started its first namaste program four years ago and added one on the Alzheimer's floor a year ago, says administrator Maureen Kalivas.

Namaste care has an especially calming effect on agitated or restless residents, she says. "Not only does it make it easier on the staff, it makes it easier for the other residents on the unit. One difficult person can cause chaos on a unit."

In the namaste room on the Alzheimer's floor, namaste practitioner Averie Smith of Orleans presides over a space he decorated with a found couch, a book of Norman Rockwell illustrations and Early American-style artwork in deep blues, rusty reds and ambers.

The light is low and the closet is stocked with neck pillows and extra blankets.

The atmosphere and attention "make everybody a lot more calm," Smith says, as he massages moisturizer into a resident's hands. "They get used to having the same person with them all the time. They know your voice, your touch. They're all so sweet. My people are probably anywhere from 88 up."

Jean Hooper of Brewster says the namaste program calmed her and her father when her mother, Jean Gould, was suffering from Alzheimer's.

"She couldn't speak. She could not articulate. She needed a little extra attention," Hooper says of her mother, who died two years ago at age 88. She and her father would sit with her mother in the namaste room, taking turns holding her hand.

"It was a good place for my father to be as well," Hooper says. "It was hard on him."

The namaste program in the upstairs solarium is open to any resident who feels the need, and staff members have been known to drop in for a moment's soothing, too, Kalivas says. She says the nursing home has 160 residents and at any one time 20 residents will be in a namaste room under the care of one of three specially trained staff people.

Kalivas says that, at least anecdotally, the incorporation of the namaste program into the nursing home is resulting in less frequent use of medications for anxiety and agitation.

"It's peaceful," says resident Anne Kischer, who was snuggled into a chair by the solarium windows. "You can just kind of drift into peacefulness."

The room was decorated to induce serenity, Simard says. Lavender iris, painted by a secretary who is also an artist, cover the doorway into the room.

Pastel containers and baskets hold medical and grooming supplies. Small water fountains burble and a sun catcher at the window glows with colorful light. Instead of medical carts, there are bureaus and sideboards, collected from swap shops and thrift stores.

A framed statement, written by two CNAs, spells out the namaste mission: "To embrace our most vulnerable and provide them with a sense of comfort, calmness and serenity because their lives are still relevant."

The namaste program is being incorporated into hospice and nursing homes around the country and the world, says Simard, who used to live on the Cape but now divides her time between Florida and Prague in the Czech Republic, where her husband is from.

The EPOCH chain has made the biggest commitment to the program, she says. Each namaste room seems to bear the stamp of the namaste practitioner's personality.

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At EPOCH in Harwich, jazzy music plays while a high-definition screen shows seascapes.

"We get to spend a lot of time with residents, do a little extra stuff for them," says namaste practitioner Shirshonna Pyne as she smooths lotion into an elderly man's hands. He looks up at her from his lounge chair, silent but beaming.

One woman hugs a realistic-looking stuffed dog, showing it off to visitors, while another woman plays with a stuffed cat, acting out a scenario of scolding and reconciliation.

Having the option of hugging something is important for residents in the namaste program, says Simard, who wrote a book called "The End-of-Life Namaste Care Program for People with Dementia."

Staff members also are trained in using scents that will provoke good memories — Pond's cold cream for the women and Old Spice after-shave for the men.

Simard encourages entire staffs of nursing homes to be trained in the namaste way of giving care. It can be difficult in the busy day of a nursing home to slow down, tell a resident she has beautiful eyes and take time to brush another's hair, but "the process is what's really important in this program," Simard says.

"When you're in a nursing home, you're scared. You're losing control," Hooper says. She says namaste care reassures residents on a deep level that their needs will be met.

"You know what it does, it brings out the best in people," Hooper says.