



One of 20 rooms at the care home

Nestled in the quiet reaches of Bandaragama, Cinnamon Grove exudes a sense of ease and comfort. With landscaped gardens, airy interiors and warm and friendly faces it is indeed home away from home for special residents who find that each day is a new day in their lives.

Words Prasadini Nanayakkara **Photographs** Menaka Aravinda

Cinnamon Grove opened its doors this year, catering to a dire need in the industry of specialised care in Sri Lanka. A dream that has been in the pipelines for many years, Milithra Wickramarachchi is at the helm of this collective effort of bringing into fruition a care home for dementia patients. “Seeing the huge demand here as with the rest of the world, where there is a growing aging population, we thought to put our experience and expertise together,” says Milithra. In partnership with her daughter-in-law Minusha, Cinnamon Care Services - Cinnamon Grove - opened its flagship nursing home closeted within rubber and cinnamon estates in Kurunduwatte.

Armed with close to 40 years of experience in elderly care specialising in dementia, in the UK, Milithra is instrumental in instilling a portfolio of services and techniques at Cinnamon Grove. "What we practice here is the University of Bradford's Tom Kitwood model of caring which has holistic and person-centric approaches," says Milithra. Person-centric care ensures the individual as a whole is taken into account including their past interests and family background regardless of age or sex. As memory loss is the underlying trait amongst dementia patients, reminiscence groups assist patients to recollect family members and their pasts.

The holistic approach involves multi-disciplinary assistance in the care of patients including family members as their involvement is key, in addition to care experts, the doctors, and activity coordinators. While at present two permanent residents already occupy Cinnamon Grove, home care, respite care, short-term stays and home care services are also offered. "We have received very good feedback about our residents as well as our home care service, as we are able to provide a focused care service geared to specific needs of the individual.

We know that there isn't one approach or technique for all patients and our trained staff are well aware of this," says Milithra. Incidentally all staff are trained and certified by Milithra who is a licenced sign-off mentor for the overseas nursing programme of the University of Glamorgan, which meets the UK Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) standards for registration. Communication amongst staff is deemed essential in delivering competent care and detailed notes are made daily in maintained files for each resident. CCTV cameras are also in place to ensure residents receive the best care.

While the care home is registered with a local private hospital in Horana and an ambulance service in case of an emergency, residents are periodically taken to a consultant psychiatrist. Additionally, nurses are also available at the home to monitor blood pressure and weight and any change in behaviour or health are reported and communicated to the families. "Family members play a significant role in the patient's wellbeing, we welcome their visits with no prior notice required," says Milithra.

Prior to admission or providing care services, a visit is made at the client's home to make a detailed assessment of the patient's condition. Secondly a family member, if necessary along with the patient, can make a visit to Cinnamon Grove and learn of the services and facilities on offer. Clients can also avail of a trial stay to make a more informed decision prior to committing the patient to the care home. "They can even stay short-term periods such as weekends so that family members may go on holiday and be rest-assured that their loved one is in good hands," explains Minusha.

The purpose-built building complete with ramps and grab rails wherever necessary, houses 20 en-suite beds. Each room amply furnished even according to the whims and fancies of the resident, has access to the garden. Special hospital beds are also available for bed-ridden members who need special care and attention.

Hygienically prepared meals can be made on request or ordered from a menu whenever a resident desires. While comforts and careful monitoring are ever-present, residents are encouraged a degree of independence in managing their own tasks. "The detailed pre-assessment allows us to determine how much care and monitoring is required," explains Minusha. "Medicating and allowing residents to sleep in their chairs is something we are strongly against. It interferes with their regular meal times, gradually resulting in their deterioration," Milithra adds further. As such activities are provided for residents held in the activity room, and are customised to meet individual needs, be it sewing or even ballroom dancing.

"The ultimate goal of Cinnamon Care is 'TO give them a good quality of Life'"

Residents may find Cinnamon Grove to be their home till the end of their days if so desired, with carers trained for end of life care as well. The ultimate goal of Cinnamon Grove as Milithra explains is, "to give them a good quality of life, as normal as possible and we have laid much emphasis on staff training to ensure this."

Situated amidst a distinct tranquillity, it is evident that Cinnamon Grove offers a peace of mind, and new lease of life even for non-dementia residents. As Milithra stresses, it is important to understand that despite the condition, the patient is above all else an individual who requires respect and is able to live a full life with dignity.

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