Judah Ronch, Interim Dean of the Erickson School to Speak at
Creating Home in the Nursing Home II – A National Symposium
on Culture Change and the Food and Dining Requirements

PRESS RELEASE
For Immediate Release
Thursday, January 7, 2010

Contact: Christie Dobson
Operations Manager
christie.dobson@pioneernetwork.net
585.271.7570 / 585.244.9114

Ronch to Explore the Psychological Link between Dining, Memory & Meaning

ROCHESTER, NY—Judah Ronch, a longtime friend of elders and the Pioneer Network is currently examining a connection between dining, memory and meaning, and he will share these reflections in both opening and closing remarks at Creating Home in the Nursing Home II -- A National Symposium on Culture Change and the Food and Dining Requirements on February 11th. The event is for eldercare providers, researchers and policy makers and specifically focused on food and dining issues regarding culture change to support self-directed living. Ronch, Interim Dean of the Erickson School at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) has served as the Executive Director of the Brookdale Center on Aging at Hunter College. He also consults for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

Dining, Memory and Aging
In a recent conversation, Ronch, a psychologist and researcher spoke of his interest in Marcel Proust’s work to illustrate the link between memory and the dining experience. It is believed that at the turn of the twentieth century, Proust was sitting in a Parisian café, dunking a Madeleine cookie into a steaming mug of tea when he suddenly recalled richly detailed memories from his childhood. This supposedly became the basis for his largely autobiographical work, In Search of Lost Time, which described his attempt to find the space where time stops.

Ronch notes that Proust described what modern neuroscience can now explain, that the act of eating, or even thinking about eating, actually stimulates neural pathways of memory and action in the brain. He further notes that if our elders are receiving institutional meals that are not memorable or tied to earlier memories, with nothing autobiographical to spark those neurons in a particular person, not only are they not remembering, they are at risk of losing memories of self. This brings a critical question to light: Is the food we are serving our elders, and how it is chosen, possibly causing them to decline in some way? Ronch intends to delve further into this question and offer considerable food for thought with his opening remarks on Thursday morning.
With No Expectations, Our Elders Have No Where to Grow

Bookending the symposium offerings at Creating Home in the Nursing Home II -- A National Symposium on Culture Change and the Food and Dining Requirements, Ronch will focus on an overview of our society’s declinist view of aging and how it is mirrored in policy and management practices. He then will motivate attendees to look at themselves and their policies, and how they might embrace changing them for the future. Moving an audience to act in this way is one of the unique features of the dining symposium—more than just a lecture-style event, Creating Home in the Nursing Home II -- A National Symposium on Culture Change and the Food and Dining Requirements promises to offer a number of interesting ways to illicit change in dining practices.

Ronch notes, “Our society . . . is a declinist culture, with no developmental expectations of older people.” He follows by saying that when we don’t offer people choice and control, we may in fact be compromising mental well being.” Thus, it is entirely possible that an individual admitted to an eldercare home for a purely physical limitation that keeps them from living independently, may actually experience a diminution of mental well-being that results from lack of opportunities for development through making choices for their “future selves” in an environment focused on safety alone.

Ronch will look closely at how our industry has made everything so safe, and in doing so, has completely removed choice and freedom from the environment. He terms the concept “surplus safety”—in which how we see elders creates an environment in which safety trumps everything else. He illustrates this by likening it to how a family might put safety measures in place for an infant—covers on the outlets, gates on the stairs, etc. But, when the baby becomes a toddler, the family begins to lessen the safety measures in accord with newly acquired abilities, so that infant may grow into a toddler. Elder “surplus safety” is the complete reverse, and is rooted in the notion that elders can’t learn.

Ronch will inspire attendees with his taking of the next step in that logic—which is to say that if we are creating environments that are too safe, if we are completely limiting choice and control, and if in turn every day is the same, every meal is the same, every activity is the same, the elder will have no sense of a future self. Indeed, time will have stopped! A stunning revelation—and one that Ronch will explore to the fullest.

Symposium Background

Creating Home in the Nursing Home II is a joint effort by the Pioneer Network and CMS to provide education and support to providers, researchers, policy makers and consumers who are engaged in eldercare reform; who are growing or sustaining culture change initiatives; or who are simply trying to develop a business model that meets the needs of an increasingly discerning aging population.

Creating Home in the Nursing Home I, held in 2008, was a sold-out event focused on Culture Change and the Environment Requirements, and resulted in the convening of a National Long Term Care Life Safety Task force that has recently submitted several proposals to the National Fire Protection Agency regarding the Life Safety Code. CMS also released new interpretive guidance for 11 regulations regarding the environment and quality of life directly stemming from the symposium recommendations.

This year’s symposium focus is Culture Change and the Food and Dining Requirements, a topic born from input given by attendees at the event in 2008. Innovations in dining including liberalized diets, buffet-style service and reductions in bib and supplement use have been welcomed by providers, but they often struggle integrating new approaches with the regulatory guidelines. This event will serve to address dining initiatives and explore potential and perceived regulatory barriers so that both innovators and regulators can come to a common understanding of responses congruent with OBRA ‘87.

Symposium Features

- Keynote by Kathy J. Greenlee, Assistant Secretary for Aging for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services;
• National expert presentations on critical issues regarding food, dining and culture change;
• Clinicians will address barriers and solutions through the lens of their profession;
• Exploration of potential regulatory and survey issues related to food and dining innovations;
• Presentation by the Food and Drug Administration on the national Food Code;
• Presentation by the Center for Disease Control on the CDC infection control guidelines;
• Members of the Agency for Health Research and Quality (AHRQ) research team will present findings from their Study of Paid Feeding Assistant Programs;
• Public commentary through open microphone sessions

**CMS and Pioneer Network Partner in the Culture Change Movement**

Creating Home in the Nursing Home II: A National Symposium on Culture Change and the Food and Dining Requirements is collaboration between the Pioneer Network and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). CMS has become a partner in the culture change movement, and wishes to encourage meaningful changes in food and dining service that provide greater quality of life for residents. CMS, therefore, has added this symposium to the set of CMS projects in nursing homes. CMS has partnered with Pioneer Network to provide a forum in which innovators, regulators, and the public can gather to hear about new ideas in food and dining, potential barriers (real or perceived) posed by regulatory and code language, and how innovators and regulators have been working together to ensure that regulations do not stand in the way of providing residents of nursing homes with optimal quality of life.

*Seating is limited for this event. For more information or to register, please visit [www.PioneerNetwork.net](http://www.PioneerNetwork.net)*

**This symposium is presented in cooperation with the American Health Care Association (AHCA) with underwriting by the American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging (AAHSA).**

**Pioneer Network** is at the forefront of changing the culture of aging and long-term care of elders in America. A growing coalition of organizations and individuals from across the nation, Pioneer Network is dedicated to making fundamental changes in values and practices to create a culture of aging and long-term care that is life-affirming, satisfying, humane and meaningful. Pioneer Network advocates for public policy changes, creates communication, networking and learning opportunities; builds and supports relationships and community; identifies and promotes transformation in practice, services, public policy and research; develops and provides access to resources and leadership; and hosts a national symposium to bring together interested parties with a desire to propel this important work.


# # #