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Are Nursing Homes Neglecting Mom and Dad?

Inspector General's Report Finds 92 Percent of Nursing Homes Cited for Deficiencies

By SHARYN ALFONSI and DIANE MENDEZ
Sept. 30, 2008



48 comments

When Carol Crow, a 60-year-old Alzheimer's patient, was found covered in bruises at her nursing home, administrators at the facility said she fell. Crow's family wasn't so sure.

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A report from the Department of Health and Human Services inspector general found that 92 percent of nursing homes were "cited for deficiencies."
(Realistic Reflections/Getty Images)

"What I saw was horrendous," said Crow's daughter, Julie Glass. "No one should ever go through what my mother went through."

While the investigation into Crow's nursing home found that there was no wrongdoing, concerns like these are not uncommon. A government report released this week found extensive problems in America's nursing homes. According to the study, nearly one in five of the nearly 15,000 nursing homes examined were cited for violations that put patients in immediate harm in 2007. A total of 92 percent were cited for some type of deficiencies during each of the last three

years.

From treating bed sores to preventing urinary tract infections, the quality of care in nursing homes was usually the focus of those deficiencies, the report found. Experts also found that on a typical day, far too many residents waited too long to get the help they needed.

Despite the report's findings, critics said just issuing "deficiency citations" won't change anything.

"Very few of these deficiencies ever result in a financial penalty," said Wes Bledsoe, founder of A Perfect Cause, a non-profit group that advocates for the reform in long-term care. "And if they do, they are not collected. The system has no teeth."

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As a result, some states are taking actions into their own hands. In New York, for instance, the attorney general's office has made nursing home care a "major area of concern" in the state, setting up a hidden camera in a nursing home it suspected of abuse. In that case, the nurse pleaded guilty to neglect and to falsifying a patient's records to cover up the crime after cameras rolled as a 70-year-old dementia patient with bed sores was left for more than 76 hours without being turned or fed.

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"It's a priority for me in this office because sometimes it's a double crime," New York State Attorney General Andrew Cuomo said. "First of all, it's a fraud against the taxpayer. In many cases, taxpayers are actually funding these organizations and these institutions and they're being defrauded. And secondly you are literally affecting the most vulnerable in our society. And that's our first priority -- to protect those people who literally can't protect themselves."

Some states have also passed laws to allow families to set up their own so-called "Granny Cams" in nursing homes, a move the nursing home industry has resisted. Those who oppose the cameras argue that it's hard enough to attract workers even without the threat of constant surveillance.

On Tuesday, the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of the Inspector General issued new voluntary guidelines to help nursing homes improve the quality of their care. According to HHS, the guidelines will address staffing issues, the management of medications and resident safety, among several other concerns.

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Member Comments (48)

I've been a consultant pharmacist in the nursing home (long term care) setting for the last 10 years. Your viewers should know that the long term care industry is one of the most regulated in the country. In my experience, office of long term care (OLTC) surveyors often feel pressured by their superiors to write a facility deficiencies. In addition, these regulations are often left to the interpretation of the individual surveyor. In many cases these deficiencies are dismissed by desk review or subsequent surveys. That is not to say that abuse or neglect never occurs. Nursing home deficiencies are public record and can be found on the Department of Human Services (DHS) website. Nursing homes are also required to post a copy of their most recent survey in the facility. If you are planning on placing a loved one in a nursing home, you should talk to the facility administrator and director of nurses and voice your concerns. Once your loved one is placed in a nursing home, get to know the nurses and aides that are involved in their direct care. You should visit the facility frequently on different shifts and different days of the week. It has been my personal experience that most nursing home employees are very caring and dedicated to their professions. Robert Holt
robertwholt 2: 10 PM

My mother is a nursing home resident. Putting a loved one in a nursing home is something that comes after you have exhausted every other possibility and the nursing home administrators know this. This is one of the reasons they don't care. They know you have no real options once you get to the point of having to place someone in a nursing home. There are many caring individuals that work on the floor with the residents. But, nursing homes are woefully understaffed. Most of the people out on the floor are CNA's and they are terribly under paid. Nursing homes seem to be set up more for caring for a person who is in the last months of their life. However, with many of the residents now coming in with dementia and living for years with

the condition, I feel that nursing homes are going to have to re-evaluate their programs and realize that many residents will be coming in and spending years there.

poetguru 2:04 PM

I'm not sure who reads these coments, but I would love ABC to look into the nursing home industry more. Yes this a serious problem. There are some many problems in LTC (nursing homes) First and foremost is the negative image associated with these places and the people that work in them. We are not all bad. Yes there are quite a few bad places. Why? Because they are permitted to keep open. Because of the mighty \$\$\$\$\$. The last paragrah in the article said alot. Just because the place cost alot or has fancy furnishings doesn't mean good care is getting done. The LTC industry is notorious for the regulations, but there are none for staffing. Huge corporations that run these places would rather take the fines than fix the problems. Why can't LTC have mandatory staffing ratios like a hospital does? Do you realized that the poor staffing in most of these places is legal???? Absurd. It is criminal. Ask any LTC nurse or CNA what it is really like.....there is your story.

lewwilann 1:55 PM

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