

GETTING GOOD CARE IN A NURSING HOME

Nobody wants to go into a nursing home. In addition, nobody wants to see a family member go into a home. However, there are many situations where long term care in a nursing facility is the best option available. It is important to remember that someone who is about to enter into a facility is entitled to and should expect THE BEST CARE POSSIBLE! This article will hopefully shed some light on how to ensure a high level of care.

The most important thing to remember in making sure that a nursing home resident receives quality care is for the family members to actively participate in that person's care. The old saying, "the squeaky wheel gets the grease" could not be more appropriate! A resident's family member can visit the facility at any time. Family members should take advantage of this and try to visit at different times of the day to make sure the resident is receiving proper care.

Pennsylvania law requires a nursing home to assess the resident's condition, abilities and limitations within two weeks of admission. It is important to make sure that this is done. This "Care Plan" must describe the resident's needs and determine how those needs are to be met. The Care Plan must be revised if the resident's condition changes and regardless as to the resident's condition, must be reviewed every three months. Family members should absolutely participate in the formulation and review of the Care Plan. It would also be very beneficial for the family member to have an advocate, such as a Geriatric Care Manager or Attorney present at the meetings that pertain to the Care Plan.

If a nursing home is certified to accept Medicare or Medicaid, (which many

homes are) they are governed by the Nursing Home Reform Act, which impose a number of requirements regarding care of the residents. For example, the Act requires a nursing facility to help a resident maintain or improve his or her ability to bathe, dress, groom, walk, eat, talk and use the toilet. The resident must be able to remain as independent as possible. The home must try as hard as possible to prevent such things as bed sores, pressure ulcers or decubitus ulcers. The Nursing Home Reform Act significantly limits the use of restraints, which require a doctor's order. The use of a feeding tube is also limited and requires the consent of the resident or resident's representative.

If a family member is concerned about the care that is being provided by the home then initially that person should voice his or her complaints to the staff and work their way through the home's chain of command. If care does not improve then the family member should seek assistance from the Long Term Care Ombudsman (717-783-1550). If still unsuccessful, the family member can complain to the Pennsylvania Department of Health and ultimately to the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services. It is advisable for the family to engage the services of a Geriatric Care Manager and an Attorney during this process.

For families of those about to enter a Nursing Home, I highly recommend purchasing the publication, 20 Common Nursing Home Problems-and How to Resolve Them. This publication can be ordered from the National Senior Citizens Law Center at www.nsclc.org.