

Council solves nursing home 'hassles'

By Susan Mahoney
staff writer

The food is cold, personal belongings are stolen, and privacy is rare and often violated.

These are just a few of the problems some nursing home residents face. But there is help. And that help may come from the mostly elderly residents themselves.

An inhouse group called a nursing home resident council exists in most Michigan nursing homes to help solve these hassles.

Gwen Pruscott, 60, secretary of the Resident Council at Bloomfield Hills Care Center nursing home, said nursing home residents need to be aware of their rights. Patients should be read their "bill of rights" once a year, she said.

The bill includes such issues as

rights to privacy, dignity, medical treatment, religion and economic freedom. Attending nursing home resident council meetings is one way to ensure that everyone's rights are being observed and complaints are being heard and addressed, she said.

AT A first-time Nursing Home Resident Council Conference sponsored by Citizens for Better Care at the Somerset Inn in Troy on Nov. 17 about 180 residents and employees representing more than 50 nursing homes gathered to exchange ideas and listen to speakers about nursing home life and the roles of resident councils.

Resident councils are made up of officers, much like a city council, or student government. The officers are all nursing home residents who have either been elected or appointed

to their position by the residents or staff.

Meetings are held regularly and are attended by nursing home administrators, nurses, aides and residents. Resident complaints are discussed at the meetings and recommendations and solutions are offered by the council.

Administrators are not required to take the council's advice, but Farmington Nursing Home Resident Council President Eileen Kritzer said her council's rapport with administrators is effective.

"I mean business," she said authoritatively. "I try to be as fair as I can."

KRITZER SAID she looks at everyone's side in a dispute.

"I don't always assume the resident is right," she said.

Councils have some problems, first and foremost being a difficulty in convincing residents to attend and participate in the council meetings.

"We have 382 residents. About 15 show up for the meetings," Pruscott said. "Some residents feel that complaining won't do any good."

But Pruscott disagrees with that philosophy. Voicing concerns is the only way nursing home administrators will respond to the residents, she said.

"If the potato is cold you better speak up," she said. "We try to settle complaints from roaches to bad food to cold drafts of air."

Susan Rourke, executive director of Citizens for Better Care, an advocacy group that crusades for more competent, compassionate elderly care, said council meeting attendance records need to be improved.

"We need the commitment of the staff to assist in this," she said.

Staff help is vital because many residents are physically incapable of getting to the meetings. But once the staff assists the residents to the meeting room, it's up to the residents to participate.

KRITZER SAID residents are responsible for speaking out at the meetings if they feel they are being wronged.

"You have to do it yourself," she said. "If a certain room is a mess, I'll say (to the employee), 'Why wasn't it wiped up?'"

The council system may have its imperfections but Kritzer, 61, said the meetings offer "a good interchange." Pruscott agreed saying resident councils are the best vehicles

to date to solve resident-administrator problems.

Rourke said nursing home residents need to keep their councils active and administrators need to be sensitive to resident concerns. In the future Rourke said she hopes more nursing home resident councils will meet together to exchange ideas and techniques for solving problems.

Area-wide resident councils where several resident councils from different nursing homes meet for.

"It's an enormous amount of work (getting resident councils together) because of transportation problems," she said.

But she remains optimistic about keeping current resident councils effective and creating new ways for them to be enriched.

Watch out!

Snow, ice, arctic temperatures tough on cars, people

Making angels in the freshly fallen snow is one of winter's delights. But winter can also bring out the devil in nature. Snow, ice, and sub-zero temperatures can hurt you or your car if you're not careful, warns an Oakland County medical official.

Call Christie, manager of the Oakland County EMS/Emergency Management, said people should follow these safety guidelines this winter to prevent dangerous situations:

• Keep informed about changing weather conditions by listening to local television and radio forecasts.

"A few hours warning can be the difference between being caught in a storm or being safe at home," Christie said.

• Familiarize yourself with terms used by the weather service. Winter storm watch means severe weather conditions may affect your area. Winter storm warning means severe weather conditions are imminent. A blizzard is a heavy accumulation of snow accompanied by

winds of more than 35 mph.

• Because of physical overexertion, which does not afflict just the elderly.

"Everyone, regardless of age or physical condition, should take precautions to avoid becoming overworked," said Christie.

IF PEOPLE are working outside they should follow a number of precautions. A scarf of bandanna can protect lungs from extremely cold air.

A Thermos of warm beverage, several layers of loose-fitting clothing to trap body heat, tightly woven and water-proof clothing as outer garments, mittens snug at the wrist rather than fingered gloves, and a wool cap are ways to stay warm and to keep body heat from escaping.

• Equip cars with winter safety tools. A shovel, windshield scraper, flares, booster cables, tow line or rope, flashlight, warm blankets, heavy gloves, overshoes, extra woolen socks and a wool hat should be in

the car in case a motorist is stranded.

"With more deaths resulting from winter storms during the past three decades than from tornadoes, hurricanes and floods combined, we want to ensure the safety of travelers in this area," Christie said.

Christie advises stranded drivers to stay calm and rationally plan their course of action. Stay in the ve-

hicle where rescuers will find you. Put on flashers, raise the hood of the car or hang a cloth off the aerial. Do not waste gas by running the heat. Exercise to maintain body heat by clapping your hands together and lifting your legs up and down. At night turn on the dome light so rescue crews will be able to spot you.

Another car-related safety tip: Don't jump dead batteries. If it is

frozen it will explode, Christie warned.

"CAR BATTERIES can freeze at temperatures below 15 degrees Fahrenheit. To avoid any risk of injury remove the battery from the car and take it inside to warm up," Christie said.

Charge the battery only in a well-ventilated area. Be sure the water is at the proper level and place a damp

cloth over vent caps. The charger switch should be in the "off" position and unplugged before connecting or disconnecting. Make the positive connection first, then the negative.

When using booster cables make sure they are of the same voltage. Connect the positive to the positive and the negative to the negative. Start the engine and remove the cables in reverse order.

Book can help find streets at a glance across metro area

New residents of the metro area and old residents who sometimes have a hard time finding their way around town will appreciate the new Rand McNally StreetFinder.

This spiral-bound street guide holds maps of every area of Oakland, Wayne and Macomb counties. It also includes in depth reference guides for special buildings and attractions, golf courses, government offices, post offices, hospitals, libraries, parks, schools, shopping centers, zip codes and more.

The guide is the first done by Rand McNally for the Detroit area and is also the first to be done using a new computer-generated system rather than physically drawing the maps by hand.

"Going to this new technology will reduce the time it takes us to update these maps," said Michael Dobson, director of cartographic services at Rand McNally. "Every year we have to recheck the streets and zip codes and everything else we include in our guides and doing this manually is very difficult. Now we'll be able to make changes much more quickly."

Dobson said Rand McNally is in

contact with hundreds of people to gather the information needed to produce the StreetFinder, which have already been done for several other major U.S. cities. A large data-gathering operation is set into place, including aerial photography and maps acquired from city engineers' offices. A great deal of cross-referencing is done to be sure the road names and suffixes are correct.

"We decided to go with a book format as opposed to the folding map because we think it's easier to handle," Dobson said. "It took about a year and a half to put this together. Sometimes we have to actually go out and drive the streets if we aren't sure about information we get from our sources."

The new Detroit-area StreetFinder includes more than 2,000 square miles of roads and 22,000 actual streets. Cost for the large, three-county book is \$24.95. Separate books showing just one of the three counties run \$14.95.

The StreetFinder is available at Waldenbooks, B. Dalton Booksellers and many other stores where Rand McNally atlases are available.

Murphy honored by local Boy Scouts

Five thousand people will be on hand when Oakland County executive Daniel Murphy is honored by area Boy Scouts as the recipient of their 14th annual Distinguished Citizen Award.

Murphy will be honored by the Clinton Valley Council Boy Scouts on Dec. 1 at the Postlase Silverdome's Main Event restaurant.

Murphy, who has dedicated 38 years to the Boy Scouts, was selected because of his involvement in scouting and community projects, said Robert Alder, director of the Clinton Valley Council.

A reception begins at 6 p.m. followed by dinner at 7. Tickets are \$75 a person and \$50 for a table of eight. Call Alder at 338-0035 for ticket information.

See you at 8.
Don't be late.

Please pass the bread.

Your generous donation to the Torch Drive can help feed the hungry.