

# Did nursing home violations happen on purpose?



**ON AGING**  
**RENEE MAHLER**

Recently I received a letter from a woman who worked for an attorney. The lawyer had a married couple as clients. Both needed nursing care and went to the same nursing home. Proceeds from the sale of their home paid for their care.

One day the lawyer was advised that the nursing home was moving the woman to a facility in another city. The given reason was that the original home was being closed due to having too many Department of Public Health violations. The new home was not only inferior to the one the client was in but it was so far away that her only visitor could not make the trip.

The letter writer continues by saying that she believes, "Nursing homes purposely accumulate violations when their Medicaid load increases, thus reducing their private-pay patients. After patients are transferred to less desirable facilities, they (nursing homes) clean up their violations, clear their status with the state and bring in a new group of private-pay patients, increase their profits and start this procedure

all over again."

While I certainly cannot verify what you describe as being a usual practice, I also cannot tell you that all nursing care facilities are only concerned with the care of the older adults in their charge. As in any industry there are most likely to be people who are only interested in making a profit.

On the other hand, there are long-term health communities that are scrupulously honest and truly have the interests of older persons in mind. Does this make everything fine? No, but who are involved with health care are constantly working to eliminate or at least educate the public about these types of practices.

It is also concerned citizens who must help. Often families are reluctant to report infractions that occur for fear that their family member will suffer the reper-

cuselons. This too should not be, but I have heard these sentiments frequently.

There are agencies, such as Citizens for Better Care, that should be informed of perceived violations of residents' rights and unfair business practices. People can become involved with organizations that oversee nursing homes. Write your state representative or congressman. If we all work together, we will be able to ensure all our older citizens the care they require in an atmosphere conducive to their physical and mental well-being.

If you wish to report or seek information concerning possible unfair nursing home practices call, toll-free, Citizens for Better Care, 1-800 292-7852, Monday-Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Q. My wife, who is only 57, has had a stroke which has left

her with some confusion. She dresses and feeds herself and is continent but needs help with her medications and bathing. I work and have to travel a great deal which means she is left alone in our home with sitters or aides. She really needs to be with other people and in a place where she could not only have company but also enjoy some activities. I am having a very hard time finding someplace where all the other people are not elderly. Have you any suggestions?

A. I am afraid that the type of care you are looking for caters mainly to older adults. What your wife probably needs is either assisted living or apartments with services. The ages of the people

living in those types of accommodations probably average in the 70s and 80s. You might, however, want to investigate adult foster care homes. I am not completely familiar with them but looking into these homes would be a good idea.

Renee Mahler is a gerontologist and the director of communications and admission at a Rochester Hills nursing facility. She is a former member of the Michigan State Commission on Services to the Aging.

To leave a message for Mahler from a touch-tone phone, call 853-2047, Ext. 1869. Send your questions to her at the Observer & Eccentric, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham 48009.

## Fitness

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facilities were another story. For about 30 minutes, I alternated between the steam room, sauna, and whirlpool.

That afternoon, we decided to go white water rafting on the Colorado River. During the bus ride from Aspen to the take-off point, our guide stressed the importance of safety measures to minimize risks. "There aren't rails attached to the bottom of these rafts," he emphasized. "This isn't Disney World." Unfortunately, even after we signed "release waivers," the seriousness of his message failed to sink in.

We put our life jackets on, climbed into the raft and reviewed our paddling instructions, eight people in all, including the guide. When we first started, it was sunny and warm, and the current was gentle. This calm scenario, however, quickly changed.

Within minutes, we were riding the rapids, attempting to steer clear of several boulders that lay ahead. A photographer, hired by the raft company, snapped our picture. Minutes later we were surrounded by tall mountains. The wind picked up, the sky darkened and the rain began to fall. As we brushed against a huge boulder, we realized that we were in for the ride of our lives.

Colorado in the summertime is a fabulous family vacation. We've already made our reservation for next year.

Barry A. Franklin, Ph.D., is director, Cardiac Rehabilitation and Exercise Laboratories, William Beaumont Hospital, Royal Oak.

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