

OTHER OPINIONS

State campaign seeks quality nursing home care

The need for our state and the nation to substantially improve the care provided to the residents of nursing homes was finally given major attention by an article in the New York Times, a report by a congressional committee and findings by the National Commission for Nursing Home Reform.

The Times story found that more than 9 of 10 nursing homes lacked adequate staff. The story, based on a report by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, found that nursing homes with a low ratio of nursing staff to patients were more likely to provide substandard care.

The Times pointed out that patients in these homes were more likely to experience bedsores, malnutrition, weight loss, dehydration, pneumonia and serious blood related diseases.

A Detroit suburban resident, Phyllis Moga, told the Times of the experiences of her mother, who had food put before her, but not enough staff to help her eat. She noted that many of the patients have dementia or are stroke victims, so they don't have the ability to feed themselves, or even know they should be eating.

She added that on two occasions, "I caught a woman who was climbing out of bed and was trapped in the bedrail, screaming for help, but there was no staff nearby to help her." Another common complaint tied to lack of adequate staff is that many patients are left in wet, unchanged beds.

Unfortunately, the Bush Administration's response to the report is that it has no plans to set minimum staffing levels for nursing homes, hoping that the problem will be resolved through market forces.

A second report by Congressman Henry Waxman and Senator Charles Grassley shows that many serious problems in nursing homes are not reported on the government's Nursing Home Compare Web site. This does not allow individuals who are searching for a nursing home to get accurate information about that home.

The Coalition for Nursing Home Reform's

Donna R. Lenhoff points out that, "One of the most distressing aspects of our work is the many calls we receive from families who cannot get a state survey agency to investigate their complaint, or whose complaints are being investigated and dismissed, no matter how badly the resident was harmed." The Michigan Campaign for Quality Care

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has found that Michigan nursing home standards are as bad or even worse than the national average.

Nursing home industry lobbyists have blocked the block every attempt by our group to pass legislation that would increase staffing and improve other conditions. Michigan nursing home staffing of 3.8 hours per resident, per day, is well below the national average of 4.2 hours. The U.S. staffing levels are also well below that of other nations.

There is a nursing home watch list that will allow you to spot nursing home facilities that have had problems. The watch is issued by Consumers Union and can be accessed on the Internet by clicking on "Nursing Home Watch List." The watch list highlights facilities that have been judged to have questionable practices.

Finally, you can work for nursing home improvements by getting involved in our organizations, the Michigan Campaign for Quality Care. The Oakland County chapter meets the 4th Thursday of the month at 7 p.m. at the Southfield Presbyterian Church, 10 Mile Road east of Lahser in Southfield. Our next meeting is Feb. 28.

Aldo Vagnozzi, a Farmington Hills resident, is active with the Michigan Campaign for Quality Care. He is currently a candidate for the House of Representatives.



Larry Cannell

Accident innovations are the hallmark at the Alameda Center

Innovation is rare, a treasure. Tap into innovation and others will pass you by.

Businesses can pay huge sums of money for innovation, through acquiring other companies or by paying high-priced consultants. Innovation can sometimes be planned with great success (think of the Apollo program in the 1960s). Sometimes, though, all the planning in the world falls short of the mark (anyone remember the New Coke?).

But sometimes all of our hard work and planning pays off in innovation for reasons we did not originally anticipate. Many of the well known innovative ideas of the past century happened because of pure luck, by accident. Among these include Teflon, Post-It Notes, and even the World Wide Web. Why without these accidental innovations we all would be using a great deal more butter to scramble eggs, taping notes to telephones and eBay would be just a dream.

Accidental innovation can occur anytime, anywhere, even here in Farmington Hills. Take the Alameda Early Childhood Center. Here is a case of an innovative educational environment that was not anticipated when Alameda was first opened to provide additional preschool alternatives and to handle the overflow of students from other parts of the (then growing) Farmington school district, primarily kindergarteners.

But, no, Alameda's pre-school program is not what I am referring to here. The innovation I tell my friends and neighbors about is Alameda's K-2 program. Based on my experience with Alameda over the past four years, I consider Alameda to be an innovative and, very possibly, a trend-setting school in the education of K-2 students - if only it was not Farmington's best-kept secret.

K-2 is considered out of the scope for early childhood development programs. Their aim is to provide a quality pre-school experience. Adding kindergarteners, and then first and second graders, to Alameda was done out of necessity. The environment that grew out of this was unintended, an accidental innovation.

If you listened to the comments from district officials at the attendance area parent forum on Feb. 6, you might think of Alameda as simply an overflow school, a place to send kindergarteners if their home school does not have room for them. It's obvious that the district does not, or has not allowed themselves, see anything beyond this.

My wife and I have never considered this to be the case. We have consistently, for four straight years, chosen to send our daughters to Alameda. There are two things you should know about our school situation.

First, neither of our two daughters attended preschool at Alameda, which would have made kindergarten an easy choice. Second, it might be hard for busy

parents to believe this, but this year we chose to keep our youngest daughter at Alameda for first grade even though her older sister now attends Beechview. This requires two drop-offs and two pick-ups every single day of the school year.

The pre-school program is wonderful; no question about it, but it is because of Alameda's K-2 program that we are now alumni.

So what is so great about Alameda? It is simple. By allowing K-2 students to learn in an environment free of older students, they are able to more fully express themselves, build self-confidence, and grow as leaders and role models much earlier in their school careers than would normally be possible.

Alameda's second grade students produce their own newspaper, read announcements over the school PA (including the daily lunch menu and weather), and take on other leadership roles. The first graders also feel part of the elite, as they know it will only be a short period time before they take on these responsibilities. In short, the Alameda second graders "rule the roost." Why should only fifth, eighth, and 12th grade students have this distinction?

I do not mean to imply that K-2 students in other Farmington schools are getting short-changed. This is not at all the case. Our oldest daughter transitioned to Beechview this year to attend third grade and was welcomed with open arms by the staff and parents, and we are proud to be part of this school community. But, still, we are grateful that she was able to live through the full Alameda experience.

So why is it that Alameda is not well known for their K-2 program? I suppose it could be a lack of PR. Maybe if it was called "Alameda Academy" things would be different. Or, perhaps, it is because this concept has not been fully documented in some doctoral thesis and published for all the great minds of academia to ponder.

For whatever reason the Alameda K-2 program works. This is obvious when you walk down its busy halls during a school day or attend a vibrant, diverse, and crowded multicultural after-school food festival. But tragically, very few know about it.

Alameda's K-2 program can still be a premier program for the district, easily on par in stature alongside of Highmeadow. This is clearly an opportunity to promote the innovative spirit of Farmington and the talent of the people who have made Alameda what it is today.

Farmington district officials and the School Board need to carefully consider their decision about the future of Alameda. Innovations like Alameda's K-2 are rare treasures. Our children, our families, and our community deserve nothing less than thoughtful deliberation before selling our future for a few pennies today.

Larry Cannell is a resident of Farmington Hills.

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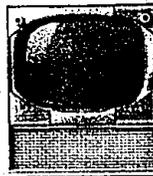
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