

**Stephen Hoffman**

From: Sharon Furlong <sfurlong5@verizon.net>
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To: Irrchelp
Subject: Department of Health proposal to raise number of hours of direct care of the elderly

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Good afternoon.

I read an article this morning in the Philadelphia Inquirer titled "NursingHome Staffing Spurs Comment" and felt absolutely compelled to write a comment myself. I was horrified by the arguments put forth by the nursing home business community and believed I needed to get my own personal story out into the mix of what is being read and considered. It is tiring, indeed, downright fatiguing to body and soul, to continually read and hear of efforts by corporations and owner operated businesses who claim that the money is not there to provide services and dignity for our frail, elderly parents, our elders, who raised us, kept our country safe, and slaved all of their lives for family. There is no morality, no sense of community, no gratitude. I am tired of venality being the only voice being heard, or listened to. So here is what I and my elderly mother lived through with my father, and then, what she and I lived through at the end of her own long life.

My father had a midbrain stroke that worsened over the course of the first months. During that time, he eventually lost the ability to feed through his mouth and needed to have a tube inserted into his stomach. He was a 75 year old man, and his wife, my mother, was 76. It became obvious that my father, as his condition worsened would be unable to return home, even for early rehab. We then got him transferred to a nursing and rehabilitation home, Langhorne Gardens, that had a decent reputation for rehab of stroke patients. This is before we knew he had a midbrain stroke that was destined to continue pummeling him, thereby preventing his returns home at all. He ended up staying at Langhorne until his death 17 months later.

During that entire time, my mother was at his bedside close to 8 hours a day, 7 days a week. I was there in my hours after I got home from work, and during the time I didn't have to go to the office. So between the two of us, we were firsthand witnesses to the changes that took place over that period in terms of staffing both on the nursing level as well as the CNA and aide levels. It was not a pretty picture: nursing staff within months of his residency became strained, reduced and spotty. We became very close to all of the staff, who adored my mother especially because she took so much work off their hands and was helpful with other patients and the staff when my father began to sleep more. They also confided in both of us about these changes and how difficult their lives were becoming. This was true for all levels of staffing, but the CNA's were being run into the ground and we watched as one by one, they became ill from the strain and as a result of the fatigue. One after another, we comforted both nursing staff and the aides as they sobbed about the situation while saying goodbye because they couldn't longer take the work or the conditions. The place changed during this relatively short period. It was heartbreaking and enraging and frightening. Most of the elderly residents had few family members who could devote time to their needs on such a consistent basis.....they went without. Without help for the bathroom, without water, without companionship, without body care. This was awful for us, but it was intolerable for them. At the end of lives, no one should be treated like an afterthought, or a burden, or an object.

My mother lived for another 13 years, eventually dying of cancer just a month short of her 93rd birthday. But for the last several months of her life, she had to enter an assisted living situation that also provided extensive nursing services, Twining Village. So once again, we both were first hand witnesses to this field of elder care at the end of life, and once again, we witnessed how much had happened.

Allow me to write that this place struggled against great odds to provide nursing and CNA care. Twining is a faith-based place and indeed, it tried to hold itself above the cutthroat tactics of the for-profit aspect of this industry. And they did, except.....they could do nothing about providing the justification of increasing hours of patient care for they indeed, answered to a more venal part of their own management, faith-based or not. And there was nothing in the law, the regulations or anywhere that might have compelled the bean counters to give them the staffing they desired and separately needed. As soon as someone called out sick, even if they were part time, the Village had to call in staff sent from a temp agency, and the care given to our elders suffered terribly from this as and indeed, the empathy and services rendered shifted dramatically from good to downright dangerous with this temp staff. We both watched, once again, good and efficient nurses and long time aides wilt and suffer from the strain, the forced overtime, the workload and the tension stemming from management . I had to quickly go to the place because my mother was screaming in pain and rage because her aide refused to move her off of her broken tailbone, a bone broken as a result of a side effect of her last cancer drug that cause her to lose balance so that she fell in her kitchen and broke the bone. And this was in a sterling place that had a better and more compassionate view of it's mandate but was understaffed and over burdened. I ended up doing for her part of what she did for my father years before: retiring from my own patient care practice and spending close to every waking hour with her, even in this wonderful place.

These rules changes do not go far enough for indeed, the industry needs something other than an upper limit of care extended . It needs money.....being paid from government, insurance and private sources so it can afford to attract, support and keep quality care personnel. It needs there to be clear standards that apply to all in every place, evenly and consistently. And there needs to be penalties to combat the deadly venality and avarice that often infects owners and management and Boards, this making them less than human but more powerful than humans.

You all need to know that this is the reality of those of us who live in and through these situations. And it it much, much worse for those of our elderly who are poor and without connections or help from loved ones. Feel free to reach out for more information if you choose....if I can do anything with my one small voice to countermand the garbage being spouted by those with their hands in their pockets and their hearts on the ground, then I will be satisfied.

Yours,

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Sent from my iPad