

Quality of Care Provided in Nursing Homes

Quality of care issues have plagued the nursing home industry for years despite national studies which have been conducted to pinpoint the problems in these healthcare institutions. The positive relationship between nurse staffing levels and the quality of nursing home care has been demonstrated widely in research studies. Despite the causal link between poor quality and staffing levels, the problems persist.

The most common themes in nursing home cases are malnutrition, dehydration, decubitus ulcers, infections, and falls. Several studies have shown that inadequate staffing and inadequately trained staff contributed to poor feeding, inadequate nutritional intake, dehydration, and malnutrition.

Low job satisfaction and high staff turnover prevail throughout the nursing home industry. Staff turnover rates for clinical care staff range between 55% and 75% in nursing homes and contributes to loss of experienced and knowledgeable workers and loss of consistency in patient care.

A study reported in the American Journal of Nursing in 2005 showed that more RN direct care time per resident per day was associated with fewer pressure ulcers, hospitalizations, and UTIs; decreased weight loss, catheterization, and deterioration in the ability to perform ADLs; and increased use of nutritional supplements. Although more certified nursing assistant and licensed practical nurse time was associated with fewer pressure ulcers, it was not associated with improvements in other outcomes.

The federal Nursing Home Reform Act (NHRA) requires Medicare and Medicaid certified nursing homes to have an RN director of nursing (DON); an RN on duty 8 consecutive hours/7 days a week and 1 RN/LPN for the two remaining shifts. There are no staffing requirements for certified nurse's aides (CNA) but these staff members are required to have a minimum of 75 hours of training. Total licenses nursing requirements converted to hours per resident day (hrpd) in **a facility with 100 residents are around 0.30 hrpd**. Is it no wonder that nursing home residents suffer from malnutrition, dehydration, decubitus ulcers, infections and falls?

Most states have additional requirements for "sufficient staff" which may vary from federal requirements. (See AL Administrative Code 420-5-10-11 or Rules of TN Dept. of Health, Div. of Health Care Facilities, Ch. 1200-8-6-.06) Both Alabama and Tennessee state standards require less RN staffing ratios but more LPN staffing.

Another common theme in nursing home cases is the relationship between poor quality and for-profit status. Research indicated that for-profit nursing homes have 20% lower staffing levels than nonprofit and governmental facilities. For-profit nursing home chains own greater than 50% of the nursing homes in the U.S.

Researchers as well as the government have performed studies to address specific thresholds for staffing standards. An expert panel recommended on full time RN DON and one RN supervisor on duty 24 hours/day, 7 days a week in all nursing homes. In facilities less than 100 beds, these positions were proportionally adjusted for size and equaled RN hrpd to a total of 1.15, LPNS were 0.70 hrpd and that

for CNAs was 2.70. **Total nursing staff hours were recommended at 4.55 per resident day.**

Although it has been well established that staffing ratios contribute to poor quality of care, in the end, quality of care in nursing homes is up to the nurses individually and collectively. It is imperative that nurses in the nursing homes work to ensure that nothing in the practice environment stands in the way of adhering to standards of gerontological care which are published by the ANA.

Consider these questions in your nursing home case:

1. Can the nurses named in your lawsuit articulate the standards of nursing care?
2. How many beds does the nursing home have?
3. What was the staffing ratio and educational preparation of the nurses on duty at the time of the injury?
4. What was the turnover rate of the clinical staff?
5. Has the nursing home received deficiencies from state or federal inspections within the last 3 years?