

Pandemic Staffing Issues Cause Distress for Nursing Home Residents

Low staff ratios have a proven effect on declining resident health

BOCA RATON, FLORIDA, UNITED STATES, March 9, 2022

/EINPresswire.com/ -- When pandemic lockdowns began in March 2020, many nursing homes suffered because of poor staffing. Sadly, both residents and staff were falling sick, some even dying, due to COVID-19. Families, previously a source of informal care for residents, could not visit due to in-person restrictions at care facilities. New job applicants to work in skilled nursing facilities were at an all-time low because nursing home corporations offered sub-par salaries and insufficient PPE to combat COVID.

Low staff ratios have a proven effect on declining resident health. These problems have existed for decades and have only worsened as the COVID-19 virus caused 150,000 resident and staff deaths in 2020. Beyond deaths attributable to COVID, an additional 40,000 residents died of non-COVID-19 causes when compared the average numbers for previous years. This indicates that COVID itself was not the only issue; residents suffered a significant reduction in care quality too.

Many family members and residents reported care issues during the pandemic, complaining



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that their loved ones received poor diets and improper hygiene. With skeleton staff numbers and restricted movement inside the facilities, the residents referred to the facilities as prisons. Statistics only confirmed these beliefs.

The most recent report, the [Consumer Voice Analysis](#) performed by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), reported that 30% of nursing homes endured staffing shortages. These shortages caused declines in basic care like washing and feeding. To grapple with low staff numbers, CMS changed many staffing requirements, such as permitting certified nursing assistants (CNAs) to enter facilities with only eight hours of training when the previous requirement was 75 hours. Rather than solve problems, this lowering of the bar caused different issues stemming from a lack of training.

In an attempt to combat long-standing problems, the Biden administration announced on February 28, 2022, an intention to study minimum staffing requirements and implement nursing home reforms. While many of the reported issues were not new to the pandemic, COVID-19 increased their incidence among residents. Injuries such as [bedsores](#), weight loss, and emotional suffering multiplied significantly. The number of patients enduring such issues often rose by anywhere from 30% to 50%. This means an up to 50% increase in preventable skin breakdowns, dehydration, and wrongful death.

Mental health diagnoses also climbed as well. Schizophrenia diagnoses rose significantly during the pandemic, about 54%. Since doctors often diagnose Schizophrenia at a young age, this increase has raised some level of suspicion. Often, nursing homes give these diagnoses as a justification for prescribing antipsychotic drugs that control patient behavior with less work and fewer staff.

As pandemic conditions have improved, the increase in on-site family care has helped many residents. However, staffing shortages continue to cause problems. Poor pay, insufficient training, and high stress cause many staff members to leave within a year of beginning work at a nursing home. Though we view nursing home staff as heroes, we rarely reward the arduous work they do. This falls on the shoulders of management and parent companies, which siphon money away from the facility and into shareholder's pockets.

A study by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid found that each resident should receive at least 4.1 hours of direct care. Unfortunately, though the study occurred in 2001, no significant changes have been made, even as the pandemic blatantly indicated the need for change more than ever.

The announcement made by the Biden administration required that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services implement staffing standards. There are also calls for more transparent nursing home ownership, instead of the current web of corporate holding companies that orbit a single facility. Hopefully, the gaps exposed by COVID will lead to significant improvements in the nursing home system.

Over 1.1 million people are residents of nursing homes, but they do not get a voice to speak up for themselves. Because of pandemic deaths, many never will. We must be a voice for the voiceless and ensure that the inexcusable understaffing conditions suffered during the pandemic never happen again.

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