



Real Deal: Nursing Homes Endangering Patients?

Reported by Katie LaGrone

Posted on: Tuesday, January 08, 2008

FORT MYERS: ABC7 discovered nursing homes nationwide are putting their patients in immediate danger. ABC7's Katie LaGrone went in-depth to find out if nursing homes in Southwest Florida make the grade.

Nursing home violations placing patients in immediate danger are up more than 20-percent in six years, according to U.S. Medicare and Medicaid services.

The latest inspections show no Southwest Florida nursing homes doing this, but that doesn't give them a clean bill of health.

Felix Coley's wife suffered a stroke 18 months ago and it forced him to place her at Charlotte Harbor Healthcare.

"They tell me she's not going to make it," said Coley. "I would take her home in a minute if I could, but I can't."

He has no complaints about the nursing home, but the state Agency for Healthcare Administration does.

Last year, Charlotte Harbor Healthcare was flagged for widespread violations after failing to investigate more than a dozen patient complaints of abuse and neglect.

Inspection reports obtained by ABC7 detail how the facility consistently failed to report allegations of physical and verbal abuse and even ignored patients with bruises.

The new director wouldn't comment on camera, but says the center is challenging those findings which contributed to the home's one star on a five star scale.

The lodge at Cypress Cove in Fort Myers ranks among the top nursing homes in Southwest Florida with a five star rating.

"We have 16 beds per nursing unit," said Ed Kunzweiler, Administrator at Cypress Cove.

But ABC7 discovered even a top score doesn't come with a perfect report.

In June, a state inspection found issues with housekeeping and maintenance. It also uncovered widespread violations for not storing food safely.

"It's a human business. If humans were perfect, we'd have perfect surveys all the time and that's not true," said Kunzweiler.

Clare Caldwell is an advocate for elder affairs. While no nursing home in Collier, Lee or Charlotte counties has violations that put patients in immediate jeopardy - Caldwell says our nursing homes have problems.

"There are things that need to be fixed," said Caldwell. "Our phone wouldn't be ringing off the hook if, in fact, there weren't problems in our facilities."

That's why she says consumers can't just rely on state inspection scores when choosing a nursing home. Instead, ask questions, visit a nursing home several times - at different hours of the day, and always ask for referrals.

"It's bad enough to have someone that's ill and you feel like you're going to lose them, to think they're not treated well," said Coley.

[Click here to do some nursing home comparisons on your own.](#) (link to AHCA's Web site)

But remember, these online results are just an overall snapshot. It's still critical to do research before making a final decision.