

Nursing Home and Assisted Living Oversight Working Group
Socialization, Visitation and Caregiver Engagement Subcommittee

Meeting Summary

Monday, November 30, 2020 10:00 AM via Zoom

The meeting was convened by Senator Cathy Osten, Subcommittee Co-Chair

1. Opening Remarks

- Senator Osten and Mairead Painter, Subcommittee Co-Chairs, welcomed the family members of residents who reside in long term care facilities and thanked them for their willingness to share their perspectives regarding the impact of COVID-19 on their families.

2. Remarks from Consumers with Family Members in Long Term Care Facilities

- Sharon Echtman – Ms. Echtman shared that her husband has been a resident of a 60 bed facility for 14 months. Prior to March 9 she was able to visit her husband twice a day. She stated that her husband's physical and mental wellbeing have deteriorated due to the dramatic changes that COVID-19 restrictions has had on his routine. She shared that the isolation and lack of socialization has left Mr. Echtman depressed and extremely confused. Since her visitations were gradually reinstated beginning in July, she reported that she and the facility staff have seen the positive impact her visits are having. She offered that she is a member of a small support group and has discovered through the group's conversations that there are different rules and regulations among facilities.
- Lynn Norman – Ms. Norman shared that her mother went to a nursing home following a massive stroke. Prior to COVID-19, she and her siblings visited their mother regularly, with Ms. Norman sitting with her each night at dinner. Once visitations were restricted, Ms. Norman saw a decline in mother's wellbeing, that she stopped laughing and talking. She recommended that nursing homes seek input from families regarding the effects that visitation restrictions are having on residents and families.
- Elizabeth Stern – Ms. Stern shared that she was very involved in her mother's care at a local nursing home. In addition, she and her siblings hired private caretakers for her mother, who worked collaboratively with the nursing home staff to provide exemplary care. Like the previous speakers, she spoke of her

mother's decline when the restrictions were imposed in March. Ms. Stern discussed the importance of the relationships she developed with the staff, both for her mother's care and for support to her.

- Sean Nugent – Mr. Nugent shared that his mother became a resident of a long term care facility when she was diagnosed Lewy Body Dementia. He spoke of the distress experienced by his father at not being able to visit and care for Mrs. Nugent. He remarked that his parents were unable to participate in the outdoor visits this summer, as the heat was too much for them. Mr. Nugent discussed the relationships that his family has formed with staff, who have provided updates on his mother and who have responded favorably to the family's requests. He stated that while he understands the need to isolate high risk groups, he believes it is important to address the social and emotional wellbeing of residents of care communities. Mr. Nugent offered the following suggestions:
 - Create more opportunities for daily face-to-face family interactions.
 - For elderly couples, ensure they have their 'time' together again; even at the risk that one may infect the other. What is worse? Dying of a broken/empty heart or dying alone from COVID?
 - Acknowledge the work of congregate care centers such as Fairview and support them.
 - Be mindful that our litigious world may also be creating additional barriers. We need to provide protection to those centers who work to increase the emotional/social well-being of their residents and families but not expose them to harm.
 - Find ways to allow families to touch! (60 Min vignette on 11/22).
- Ms. Painter thanked the speakers for sharing their stories. She shared that she hears stories like these regularly. She stated that nursing homes are working hard to keep up with the needs of residents, but the task is challenging due to the restrictions called for in the federal guidelines, as well as the impact of staff shortages due to COVID-19. Ms. Painter further stated that it is important to hear the ideas of residents and families regarding ways to support individuals.
- Rep. Hughes stated that the risk to the quality of life and social and emotional needs of residents is now proportional to keeping people safe from COVID-19. She shared her concern that nursing home residents will not be able to bounce back from the prolonged periods of isolation.
- Mag Morelli thanked the speakers for their stories. She stated that the protocols and regulations that were initially put in place were expected to be short term and that no one could have anticipated that that procedures would be needed for such a long period of time.

- Debra ONeall stated that as a therapeutic recreational specialist she understands how extremely important it is for residents to see their family members. She also spoke of the benefits of therapeutic recreation during this time.
- Matt Barrett spoke of the continuing efforts by the long term care facilities to strike the right balance of protecting the physical wellbeing of residents and staff and the social and emotional wellbeing of residents.
- Rep. McCarty expressed her appreciation to the speakers for the information they shared. She asked Ms. Echtman to speak to the issue of family support groups. Ms. Echtman stated that she is not part of a support group within her husband's community, rather she speaks with people with whom she has developed friendships whose family members reside in nursing homes.
 - Mr. Nugent commented that he is not aware of a family support group where his mother resides and that he, like Ms. Echtman, has developed his own support network.
 - Ms. Norman offered that there is a group called "Caregivers for Compromise" on Facebook that has over 11,000 members.
 - Ms. Painter commented on how Facebook allows families to inform and support one another. She applauded family members for finding these support networks and staying connected to each other.
- Ms. Arburr commented that facilities find it challenging to promote family councils, as people have different timeframes for when they are available to participate. She stated that the issue of family councils needs to be looked at as a means for families to voice their suggestions and concerns. Rep. McCarty concurred with Ms. Arburr's comments on the need to support family networks.
- Ms. Stern remarked that the group kept referencing the elder population in long term care facilities, but there are so many residents who are not elderly. In addition, she pointed out that one of the recommendations in the Mathematica report is to develop an essential caregiver program.
- Representative McCarty asked Ms. Morelli and Mr. Barrett to provide demographic information on nursing homes.

3. Other Business

- Senator Osten asked members to each develop a list of policy suggestions that could be discussed at the next meeting. Members are to forward their suggestions to the Subcommittee Administrator.

Having no further business, Senator Osten adjourned the meeting.