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Long-Term Care Residents: **An Ombudsman on Your Side**

Your mother seems to be adjusting to nursing home life as well as she can. But one issue pops up every time you visit — how cold the water is in the shower. The problem has continued for a couple of months even though your mother and you have brought it up with staff several times. The problem is on-going, now your mother doesn't want to shower at all.

Sometimes, people need help fixing problems — like the one above — that arise in nursing homes. The good news is, there is someone available to help nursing home residents and their families in every state.

This person, called an ombudsman, is responsible for making sure problems get resolved in nursing homes. They also cover assisted living residences, board and care homes, and other places that provide long-term care to older adults. Through the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, thousands of ombudsmen are working across the country to make sure people get good care.

How Do I Find An Ombudsman?

- Check in the residence. There should be a sign posted listing the ombudsman's office and telephone number. If you can't find the sign, ask the staff for the information.

- Call the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116. The Eldercare Locator is a toll-free telephone service run by the U.S. Administration on Aging, the federal agency that also oversees the Ombudsman Program. When you call, ask for the local ombudsman program that serves your area.
- Contact the state Long-Term Care Ombudsman office. This office is often located in the state office on aging. You can look in the phone book or go to the National Long-Term Care Ombudsman Resource Center at http://www.ltcombudsman.org/static_pages/ombudsmen.cfm. This site lets you click on your state and find the contact information you need.

What Will The Ombudsman Do?

Ombudsmen are trained to investigate and resolve complaints about a nursing home or other residence. An ombudsman will:

- Listen to the complaint and talk to the resident about it;
- Investigate the problem;
- Try to solve the problem by working with the staff;
- Notify agencies that license and regulate the facility if needed.

An Ombudsman on Your Side

In addition to resolving problems, ombudsmen can give you information about residents' rights, how to handle issues before they become major problems, and how to find a quality home. They can answer questions about nursing home procedures, eligibility, and payment. They can also help you understand the resident contract.

A Problem to Be Solved

Mrs. Smith is a nursing home resident on Medicaid. Her daughter manages her finances. The nursing home says they will discharge her next month because they have not gotten paid for her care in several months. Her daughter contacted the ombudsman to help investigate why the nursing home has not been paid by Medicaid. She wants to make sure her mother can stay and get the care she needs.

Will the Ombudsman Use My Name?

An ombudsman will not mention who has made a complaint without a resident's permission. Depending on the problem, however, there might be times when it's very hard to keep the resident's identity secret. It's illegal for a nursing home or any facility to take any kind of negative action against a resident who filed a complaint.

Investigate the Situation

Mr. Johnson lives in an assisted living residence. When visiting, his son notices that his father's dentures are missing. In fact, his father hasn't been eating much of his meals lately because he can't chew without his dentures. The dentures have been missing for two weeks and the staff just keep telling the son that they are "working on it." Mr. Johnson's son contacted the ombudsman to investigate the situation further.

How is the Ombudsman Program Funded?

The Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program is funded with government dollars. Residents and their families do not have to pay for ombudsmen services. In addition to 1,000 paid ombudsmen, 8,000 certified volunteers also serve the program throughout the United States.

Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities have a right to quality care that is free from abuse, neglect, discrimination, or retaliation. If you have a problem with the care you or a loved one is receiving, speak up. Talk to an ombudsman about what you should expect and what you are getting. If something doesn't seem right, it probably isn't. Ombudsmen are there to support you, protect your rights, and help you get the best care.



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