

Regulations Fail to Aid 'Living Dead'

They describe themselves as the living dead, people who spend the final days of their lives eating, sleeping, staring and, finally, dying.

They are the victims of a multimillion-dollar nursing home and shelter care boom in the Chicago area that has mushroomed beyond the control of city and state health officials.

Volumes of regulations have been written about controlling this industry in Illinois, but they are not enforced because the elderly poor who exist in these warehouses for the dying have no voice. Their lives are controlled by those who profit from these warehouses and they are tragically aware of it.

Just Eats and Sleeps

"I don't do nothing all day because there's nothing to do," said an elderly patient at the Winston Manor Nursing Home, 2155 W. Pierre Av. "I don't think about nothing because there's nothing to think about. I just eat and sleep, just like an animal."

The patients beg at Winston Manor. They beg for food, for coffee, for help with their wheelchairs and in some cases they beg to maintain their dignity. They stripped one old man of his dignity one morning at Winston Manor as he begged for help to get to the bathroom. His bed was directly across the hall from the nurse's aide desk, but they ignored him and continued their gossiping. Finally, unable to control himself, the man gasped and relieved himself on the floor.

Then he stood staring as the group of aides laughed hilariously while one aide giggled and sprayed the air with a cheap aerosol deodorant.

"See, he wanted someone to

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help him, but no one came," a nurse told the aides.

"We're Living Dead"

"We are the living dead," said an elderly tenant of the Golden Age Home, 4542 N. Malden St., where residents apparently are shifted about from home to home to comply with city codes. "Look around at these people. We're all worn out and we just keep on living. We would be better off dead."

The home has a history of operating without a license and was fined \$100 in 1968 for refusing to permit a Chicago Board of Health inspector inside. It was fined \$100 the same year for operating without a license.

A city health inspection yesterday showed only 12 residents in the home, and only 2 who required shelter care. Under health department rules, 3 persons must require care before the board has jurisdiction.

Nurse Denied Entry

The inspection was completed only after a public health nurse was refused entry and her supervisor went to the address two hours' later. No charges were filed against the home, however, for refusing permission to enter.

A reporter who worked in the home and bathed patients counted nearly 20 occupied beds

during his employment at Golden Age.

The reporter was hired at another home operated by the same owner at 856 W. Buena Av. During the interview, the owner, Mrs. Peggy Johnson, said she also operated nursing homes in Alabama and Florida and the Chicago homes had been neglected while she was in the South.

Toilets Frozen

She said vandals had broken into the Buena home and before the windows could be replaced the toilets upstairs had frozen. She also warned that portions of the front of the Malden Street home had been closed for the winter because of electrical problems and "we have people stacked on top of people."

She said she closed off the front after smoke started coming from electrical outlets and that the area would remain closed until her son has a chance to repair it in the spring.

The walls and floors are filthy in the Golden Age Home and portions of the ceiling in a room occupied by three residents appears ready to collapse.

Staff Complains

A reporter employed as a maintenance man at the Approved Home, Inc., 909 W. Wilson Av., learned that the former maintenance man had been fired for a variety of offenses, including alleged sexual attacks on former mental patients.

The staff at Approved Home complained of conditions in the former transient hotel and one nurse's aide said she was "sick and tired of finding rats and cockroaches in the linen room every night."

"Well I wrote two checks to take care of that, but they [the management] voided both of them," said the assistant administrator.

The cook had this comment about some of the food delivered one morning: "This lousy food they send over here. It's the stuff they can't get rid of anywhere else. I don't know why they even bother to order it."

Living quarters for the 79 residents, most of whom are former mental patients, are on the second and third floors. Recent efforts to replaster the ceilings on the second floor left the place in a mess, with plaster splattered over furniture, floors, mirrors, shades and the luggage of residents.

At the Maple Nursing Home, 4743 W. Washington Blvd., one of the owners told a reporter applying for work that the home has operated for two years without a license because of health department charges. She said the case is in court and the home will remain open at least until the case is settled.

Physical Takes Minute

Nor is any attention paid by many homes to requirements under the city ordinance that all employees be free of communicable diseases. A reporter hired at the Austin-Congress Nursing Home, 901 S. Austin Blvd., was given a physical examination that took less than a minute. It consisted of another employee looking into his eyes and reporting to the

head nurse, "There's his physical; he passed."

The reporter was hired as an orderly, performed nursing duties, and at one point was asked by a doctor his diagnosis of a patient's illness and what medication should be prescribed. The reporter said he didn't know.

The Austin-Congress charges a flat fee for providing shelter and food, but everything else is extra, according to staff members. This includes additional charges for wheelchairs, diapers for those who can't control their body functions and physical therapy.

Would Rather Be Dead

Patients spend their day roaming the halls muttering, "I'm hungry, I'm starving." Another man had tears in his eyes as he shuffled across a room pushing a chair ahead of him for support.

"I would rather be dead than suffer like this every day," he said.

Another woman explained that only her strong religious belief enabled her to endure.

"You haven't seen real misery and real suffering until you've been in one of these homes," she said. "Some of the people just lose their minds. A while back I thought I would go crazy in here. I would stult my eyes and see faces snarling at me. But I have something, I have religion, faith in God—that pulled me thru."

Tomorrow: Becoming a patient. Pay in advance and no questions asked.