

Nursing Home's Shaving Time Becomes Torture for Patient

The young man had just begun to mop the filthy floor of the South Side nursing home when he was summoned by a nurse's aide.

"Hold this guy's head or I'll never get him shaved," the aide ordered.

The old man, his body crippled by a nervous disorder that caused his arms and head to jerk uncontrollably, hadn't been shaved in a week. It was a difficult task at best and today it would quickly become an ordeal.

Using only a pan of cold water and a sliver of soap, the aide began hacking away at the whisker growth. She had gathered several old safety razors for the job and as the blood trickled down the patient's face she would discard one and try another.

Seeks New Blade

Finally, unable to watch it any longer, the mopboy told the aide to wait while he ran thru the home searching for a razor blade that hadn't been used before. When the ordeal was finally over, the aide

added a final touch to the patient's discomfort. She splashed rubbing alcohol over his face in an effort to stop the bleeding.

This is the Monterey-Drexel Home, 4616 S. Drexel Blvd., one of a chain of nursing homes owned by the N-H Management Corp., 105 W. Adams St.

The shaving incident is one of many examples of the kind of care received by thousands

of elderly citizens living in warehouses for the dying in the Chicago area.

Exposed 8 Years Ago

TRIBUNE Task Force reporters worked as orderlies, janitors, nurses' aides, and mopboys to document the abuses.

This is the second time in the last eight years that the Monterey-Drexel Home has

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A Simple Shame Becomes Torture

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been exposed for filthy conditions and wretched patient care. The N-H Corp. is headed by Joseph Bonnan, a former aide to Mayor Daley and the man who wrote the city's nursing home code while serving as the mayor's assistant.

The same day that the aid man submitted to the shaving ordeal, another aide was discussing the plight of an emaciated marl too weak to move from his bed.

"He's supposed to be on a special high protein diet," the aide explained to a reporter employed as a mophoy. "But he gets the same thing every-one else gets."

Patient Given Views
Another patient, one of hundreds dumped into private homes in an effort to reduce the patient load at state mental hospitals, discussed his problem this way:

"I wish I was back there [Kankakee State Hospital]. They don't care here. You come here all messed up, you're gonna stay messed up. They don't pay no attention to you."

His conclusions tragically parallel the attitude of the administrator of Monterey-Drexel. "We're not going to help them [the patients]," she said. "I don't worry about them. I just want to keep myself out of here."

Home in Palatine
At the Bee Dozier Home in Palatine, an old farmhouse that houses up to 40 patients, a reporter working as a nurse's aide made the mistake of attempting to change the bath water after every patient.

"Don't do that," a male

orderly cautioned. "I just let a little bit out and add a little clean hot water to warm it up a bit. This ain't the Savoy dear. It's the Workingman's Palace and we don't do that." The Workingman's Palace is one of Skid Row's largest flophouses.

The orderly then poured a single pitcher of clean water into the tub and used the dirty water to give two more patients their weekly bath.

Many Alcoholics Used
The male orderly was one of dozens of Skid Row alcoholics who make up the major labor force at the Dozier home.

Recruited from a West Madison Street flophouse by a maid who receives a kickback for every derelict, the men are sent to the Newberry suburb by train and then ride to the nursing home. They must stay at least 30 days and work at orderlies, nurse's aides and cooks. During two of the three shifts in the home they are the only employees in charge of patients.

The only nurse at the home explained that before she was hired a year ago one of the derelicts was performing all the nursing duties. She said the same employee who gave the baths had been banished to the laundry shack recently after he was caught stealing drugs prescribed for the patients.

Scrimping on Food
The home also features one of the most unusual diet items uncovered during the investigation. In order to scrimp on the food budget, the head nurse explained, the management purchases such items as canned pineapple cores instead of the more expensive pineapple slices. The cost cutting scheme apparently backfired, however, when the employees couldn't eat the so-called fruit and a blender failed to pulverize it.

At the Park House, 2320 S. Lawndale Av., which describes itself in a brochure as "Chicago's newest, most modern convalescent, retirement and nursing home," the weekly bath became a horrifying experience for a 64-year-old patient.

Two nurse's aides were at-

tempting to make the patient sit down in the bath tub despite his pleas to "let 'em down. I can't bend my legs this fast."

Aide Slaps Patient
One of the aides responded with a sharp slap across the face and the old man cried out in pain.

Another aide slapped a patient who objected to the way he was being shaved.

The home is infested with cockroaches and puddles of urine are allowed to dry on the floor. No effort is made to provide special care for patients unable to control their body functions.

One aide, who has worked in a number of other nursing homes, said it was the first home she had seen where such patients did not receive extra care. Instead, she noted, "they have the patients' bare buttocks against the chairs. These kind of patients are kept in a number of diapers, but they don't do that here."

One subzero morning at Park House, a senile woman managed to make her way into an outer hallway where the temperature hovered around freezing. She was shakily uncontrollably from the cold. When the maintenance man called her plight to the attention of an aide he was told:

"She'll come in when she gets cold enough."

Clean Front Hallway
The home's claim to being the city's most modern is apparently based on the carpet given to the front hallway and several selected rooms. George Smith, the administrator, insisted that particular attention be paid to areas of the home that might be seen by visitors. "Take special care of these front two rooms, my office and this hall," Smith told a mophoy. "You know what I mean, anything that people will see when they first come in, we must keep it very clean."

The Beacon Hill Nursing Home, 4530 N. Beacon St., also restricts its sanitation demands to the front hallways. While the first floor glistens from re-

peated mopping and waxing, the second floor is constantly filthy and includes chipped and cracked toilets and toilet seats, plumbing plumed loose from the walls, and in one bathroom, a toilet jarred loose from the floor that floods the entire room every time it is flushed.

Owner Explains Procedure
The most helpless of the patients are kept on the second floor, the owner pointed out, "so they don't smell up the first floor."

In a day room a very old woman is ignored completely and spends hours each day slumped forward in a chair with her head against her food tray. She had been in this position so long that a large circular sore has opened on the tip of her nose.

Patients, including an elderly diabetic, frequently complain that they don't receive their medication. The nurse's aide assigned to the floor occupied by the diabetic said she refuses to give him his insulin because "it scares me to stick needles in people."

Tries to Get Medicine
In another case, a woman cried out for hours in an effort to tell someone she hadn't received her medication the night before or that morning. She was told to shut up by several aides, but persisted until the chief nurse told her: "You got along without your medication last night, you can get along without it today."

Pills Found on Floors
The nurse then noted that the woman had not received her medication the previous night because someone had gone home with the keys to the medicine cabinet. Sometime later the nurse told an aide to give the still complaining patient her medication.

"What's she get?" the aide asked.

"Oh, a white one, a yellow

one, and a black one and green one," the nurse answered.

Several days earlier, while mopping the floors at Beacon Hill, a reporter hired as a maintenance man discovered a pill on the floor where it had been tossed or dropped into a puddle of urine. He picked up the pill and complained to an aide that he was finding pills on the floors through the home.

The aide took the pill, walked over to the medicine cabinet, and dropped it inside a pill bottle to be used again.

At the Whitehaven Acres Nursing Home, 1505 Greenwood Rd., Glenview, and the Kenmore Nursing Home, 5517 N. Kenmore Av., investigators noted pill swapping by aides at medication time. One patient runs out of medication, the medicine prescribed for another is used. At Whitehaven the cook dispensed medicine.

Throw Pills Away
At the Melbourne Nursing Center, 4621 N. Racine Av., the aides throw away pills if a patient has a reputation for balking at taking his medication.

Neither is any effort made at Melbourne to maintain accurate records of day-to-day progress or problems of the patients.

The licensed practical nurse in charge of the shift was aware of the practice and cautioned the employes to also enter a time for their observations, pointing out that "these are legal documents. If anything should happen and you get pulled into court on them, they are the only way you can prove it didn't happen on your shift."

Tomorrow: Eating, Sleeping, Staring and Dying.