

# Nurse Homes Defy Health, Fire Codes

They hire strangers off the street without bothering to find out who they are and pay them a pittance to care for thousands of helpless, elderly and mentally-disturbed patients.

They profess to operate according to strict guidelines set down by public health officials, yet thumb their noses at state inspectors who seek to close them down for hundreds of health, fire and sanitary violations.

They are licensed to operate in new buildings, old buildings, transient hotels and former farmhouses.

They are the operators of dozens of state-licensed nursing homes in the Chicago area and they have been given the responsibility of caring for our most helpless citizens. They are the owners and operators of warehouses for the dying and they may be reaping their profits at the expense of one of your loved ones.

We worked in these warehouses for six weeks as maintenance men, nurse's aides and janitors to document the abuses and loss of dignity endured by the patients. What we found is a list of wretched conditions which exceed even the worst charges contained in the reports of state inspectors.

One of the largest North Side warehouses is the Melbourne Nursing Center, 4621 N. Racine Av., owned and operated by Daniel S. Slader. Slader, who is treasurer of the Metropolitan Chicago Nursing Home Association, repeatedly has been cited by state health inspectors but continues to receive nearly \$400,000 a year from the state to care for elderly and mentally-disturbed patients.

A reporter who worked in the home as a nurse's aide uncovered so much patient neglect and filth that many of the nearly 200 persons living there sleep in their own excrement without blankets or heat. The few who dare to complain are cursed and threatened with physical violence.

"The Chicago Board of Health has tried desperately to put Melbourne out of business," said Russel Bryant, administrator of the long-term care department of the Illinois Department of Public Health. "The state has too. We've been trying to get a number of the bad ones out of business."

Slader was fined \$110 last July in Municipal Court for "violations and the failure to correct violations." State records show his attorney was State Sen. Bernard Niestein (D., Chicago).

One month later, a surprise inspection by the county and state health departments found conditions described as "deplorable" and noted urine-saturated beds, broken plumbing, peeling plaster and inadequate food. The home has been the target of complaints from patients and their relatives since January, 1965, but each year its license has been renewed.

The Park House, 2320 S. Lawndale Av., has had its license renewed each year since it first opened in 1961, despite the fatal stabbing of a doctor by a drunken nurse's aide, alleged patient mistreatment and a drug scandal in which public aid funds paid for phony bills for medication.

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## Task Force Report

The first assignment of the newly formed *TRIBUNE* Task Force was a comprehensive investigation of nursing homes in the Chicago area. To carry it out, reporters William Jones, Philip Caputo, William Currie and Pamela Zekman worked in nearly 20 homes. This second report identifies some of the homes where patient neglect is rampant.

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## Warehouses for the Dying

## Profit Motive Cited as Reason for Neglect in Nursing Homes

(Continued from first page)

Last year public aid paid the home \$237,927 to care for old, poor people.

The owners of Park Home have a printed brochure describing it as one of Chicago's most modern retirement and convalescent homes; but an investigator for the Better Government Association, working as a mop boy, discovered differently.

Some of the rooms, where up to four patients are bed-ridden and require special care, have developed a stench over years of neglect which forces employes to hold their breath when they enter. The floors are flooded with urine which also has stained the walls, floors, furniture and beds.

A typical breakfast is a bowl of soupy oatmeal, half a glass of orange juice and coffee. Patients frequently beg for more food and many pick up their trays and lick them



Joseph Bonnan (from left), Sen. Bernard Neistein and Dr. Franklin Yoder.

clean. One woman complained that she had found soap powder in the bottom of her coffee cup and another received this response from a nurse's aide after accidentally spilling a food tray:

"If that's the way you're gonna be, you just won't eat."

## Profit Motive Blamed

"There are problems in the quality of long-term care," said Dr. Franklin Yoder, chief of the State Department of Public Health. "This is mainly due to the fact they (nursing homes) are proprietary interests. The owners are out to make a profit. You don't have the boards of dedicated public servants who operate hospitals.

"We try to follow up every complaint. Of course, many of the patients in nursing homes are not able to make their complaints known. They're held in the homes as virtual captives."

"I agree with Dr. Yoder that the profit motive has a lot to do with the quality of care," said Dr. R. F. Sondag, chief of the state health agency's chronic illness division. "Because the operators are interested in making a profit—in running a business—the first thing they'll cut down on is the quality and number of the staff and on food."

One of the largest nursing home chains in Chicago is operated by the N-H Management Corporation with offices at 1200 W. Belden Av. The corporation is headed by Joseph Bonnan, a former aide to Mayor Daley and the man who in 1959 authored the city's nursing home enforcement code. In addition to serving as president of the corporation, Bonnan heads the labor relations committee of the Metropolitan Chicago Nursing Home Association.

## Served as Vice-President

At the height of a 1962 nursing home scandal involving Dr. Leonard Tilkin and Tilkin's chain of 17 nursing homes, Bonnan was vice president of the Tilkin organization. One of the homes involved in the Tilkin scandal was Monterey-Drexel, 4516 S. Drexel Blvd., where inspectors found widespread filth and patient neglect.

A task force reporter employed in the same home this month as a maintenance man discovered that little has changed in the last eight years. The institution is so filthy

that employes have learned to joke about the different colored cockroaches which swarm through the kitchen and dining areas.

"We're not prejudiced here, we have them in all colors," said a cook. "You just have to get used to them. We got rats too."

On one of the days the reporter was working at Monterey-Drexel, an employe of the Nursing Home Association appeared in the home to show old movies at 35 cents a head. The movie had been scheduled to be shown the day before and the patients had been herded into a room where they sat staring at the wall for three hours waiting in vain.

## Home Is Called Worst

When the projectionist from the association appeared the next day he struck up a conversation with the reporter and described himself as somewhat of an expert on nursing homes because his family has been in the business for years.

"This [Monterey-Drexel] is the worst one," the projectionist said. "The only way to run a nursing home is to bribe the inspectors. The only people not on the take are the firemen."

Later the same day, the administrator of the home also talked about city enforcement and mentioned the name of a city inspector who cooperates with the home.

"The building department is no problem," the administrator said. "They come in and say 'put two windows here' and you don't have to do it for a year. You know what I mean?"

## Chapel Is Glistening

At the west suburban La Grange Convalescent Home, the three-story building is a maze of filthy rooms covered with cobwebs and reeking with the stench of urine. There is one exception in this depressing home for about 50 sick and elderly patients. On the third floor is a sparkling wood-paneled chapel equipped with an altar, organ and new folding chairs. This is where the owner, Bert L. Jacobs, practices his work as a faith healer. The chapel is dedicated to a former patient who Jacobs claims arrived at the home as a cripple and left in good health.

During his employment in the home as a maintenance man, a reporter complained to his supervisor about the stench in some of the rear rooms where he was working.

"I know," said the supervisor. "I can't wait until we're done working in this part of the building and get up front. They keep most of the rooms up front real clean for show. Those are the rooms they show people who want to bring somebody in here."

One nurse's aide had some pointed comments on the food served at La Grange:

"It's slop" she said. "It's enough to make you sick."

A reporter hired as an orderly at the Austin-Congress Nursing Home, 901 S. Austin Blvd., immediately was placed in charge of caring for 34 male patients.

One of his patients, who said he was a retired Municipal Court judge suffering from heart blockage and arthritis, complained of the difficulty in seeing a doctor. On this day he had just spent the night with no heat in his room and was having trouble lifting his arms.

"The longer I stay here the worse I get," he said. "A few weeks ago, Dr.—came to my room. He had just started looking at me when a nurse told him his Cadillac was blocking the driveway. He went downstairs to move his car and that was the last I saw of him."

## New Girl Takes Over

At White Haven Acres, 1505 Greenwood Rd., Glenview, an estimated 32 patients live in a converted gymnasium building where a reporter was hired as a nurse's aide and left in charge of the home her second day on the job.

She also was told to administer medication to all the patients, a procedure which is announced to the residents by an aide standing at one end of the building and shouting "medicine."

During one of these medication sessions, the reporter narrowly averted a disaster as she prepared to give several pills to an elderly man. At that moment, another aide who had forgotten her purse returned to the home and noticed the reporter was preparing to give the man his pills. Almost as an afterthought, the aide said:

"If his [the old man's] pulse is over 60 don't give him the pill. He has heart trouble or something and he might have a heart attack. Sometimes you screw up giving these pills, but it happens."

Tomorrow: Caring for the elderly—nobody cares.