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Lawsuits against nursing homes don't help the residents

Ted Adams/For the Times-Standard

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In regards to the recent events with the jury award against the Skilled Healthcare nursing home chain and the stock of Skilled tumbling, most people think that not only Skilled but other chains deserve the same.

Most people feel nursing homes are not doing what they are supposed to be doing. Most people were not around when nursing homes were wards, and one nursing assistant had to take care of up to 15 or 20, feeding, clothing, bathing, etc.

I remember the scandal in the late sixties which was in the news about the Chicago nursing homes and the filth and degrading conditions that the staff had to put up with. We have come a long ways from those days. The nursing home industry is very highly regulated, and many of us who work or have worked in the industry know how much things have changed even over the last 40 or 50 years.

I have worked with short staff because nobody could be found to come in. At times ,people are sick or have emergencies. How do you fulfill staffing requirements when there are absolutely no persons available? I have worked when the DON and the administrator had to help out on the floor, when the Registry had nobody to come in, when people had to be sent home sick, etc.

Sure, it is easy to give an injunction and say that each home will fulfill the law of staffing, but what can be done when it is impossible to do so? I think that the money put out is based not on reality, but on just looking at the days when staffing was short, without

taking into consideration why they were short on some days.

I am not saying that the nursing corporations don't have some things to be considered and cleaned up, or that I agree that there are not improvements to be made, or even that they should not be held accountable for instances of a lack of discernment in the resident care aspect of what they are supposed to be doing. But I feel that to squash any attempt to improve conditions by taking money away from the corporation to punish them only in the end punishes the residents.

If the money was to be put into a fund to improve resident care with wages, improved maintenance levels and more and better oversight to insure residents were being taken care of, that would be good. But if all this money goes to lawyers, the person(s) bringing the lawsuit or to the state, and the corporation has to try and hobble something together to keep in business, how does that help the residents?

In the years that I have worked for the industry, it always troubled me when the fines went to the state or whatever, and not into improving the resident care of the home or homes fined. The state pays most of the bills for the residents, and to give then take away never made sense to me.

It is going to be interesting to see how this pans out. But I can see that if the nursing home industry is hit with a lot of lawsuits because of the

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precedence of the rulings here in Humboldt county, the nursing homes may end up with the government. I wouldn't mind being an employee of the government with benefits and all, but is that what we, as people of this county, state and nation, really want for the industry?

Sure, we all want to insure good resident care. Then help us to do so and not engage in further nursing home bashing. This means to have good people with good ethical and moral ideals interested in giving good care, good input and communication within and without the industry, insuring that the residents and the relatives help and assist us so we can take care of them as far as possible in the way they expect, and be appreciative of our overall efforts to further the goals that each resident desires.

We in the industry are not perfect and we do have some who are not very good. We try to weed out the bad ones, but like in any industry, it is very hard to do.

I know that many will disagree with me. That is OK. They may even say that I am prejudiced. Perhaps I am, but I just want justice and care for the residents, and I feel that what is transpiring will increase the difficulty of doing so.

Those of us who continue to work in these facilities will continue to care as best we can for the residents we have. We only ask the public to consider all angles of what we have to put up with and not just a few items. Thank you for all those who do appreciate what we are trying to do.

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