



Nursing Home Heroes

Advocates work to improve and ensure quality of care for residents in long-term care settings.

Almost everyone knows someone living in a nursing home or other long-term care facility. In most cases, our loved ones are provided with good quality care. But what if all is not well. Who can you turn to if you suspect abuse or neglect? What can be done if the facility is threatening to move or discharge the resident? For these and other situations where a third-party could help to investigate a complaint and/or facilitate a resolution to a conflict there is free help, nationally available, through the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program.

For over 30 years the Ombudsman Program has worked to improve quality of care in long-term care settings and to advocate on behalf of residents. Funded under the Older Americans Act, it is administered by the Administration on Aging, mostly through Area Agencies on Aging in local communities. Ombudsmen are required to visit all licensed long-term care facilities. Their consistent visits build rapport with residents and staff, safeguard resident rights and promote dignity and respect of the residents.

What is the Role of an Ombudsman?

Ombudsmen work on behalf of those who cannot advocate for themselves. They assist residents and facility staff to understand resident's rights. The advocacy efforts of ombudsmen are done on many different levels, such as representing residents' interests to facility administration and in drafting legislation.

Ombudsmen also work on local, state and national committees to help

strengthen and enhance efforts to improve the quality of care in long-term care facilities.

Another important duty is education. Ombudsmen are available to assist the public with information about facility selections, long-term care questions and concerns, medical coverage, transfer and discharge issues as well as federal and state services, regulations and standards.

An ombudsman acts as a mediator and/or complaint investigator on *behalf of the resident*. Complaints come from different sources and vary in scope and severity. They may be reported by residents, family members, friends, facility staff or observed by an ombudsman during a visit. Complaints range from abuse and neglect, to basic care issues.

Ombudsmen encourage resolution at the lowest level possible, often working as a mediator between the involved parties. Due to the fear of retribution, however, they also can maintain the complainant's confidentiality, as federal laws protect ombudsman records.

Residents Rights

Resident's rights are guaranteed by federal law and by many states. Residents have the right to:

- be treated with respect and dignity
- be free from chemical and physical restraints
- manage their own finances
- voice grievances without fear of retaliation
- associate and communicate privately with any person of their choice
- send and receive personal mail

- have personal and medical records kept confidential
- apply for state and federal assistance without discrimination
- be fully informed prior to admission of their rights, services available and all charges, and
- be given advance notice of transfer or discharge.

Be an Informed Consumer of Long-Term Care

The Ombudsman Program should not be confused with other state and federal regulatory agencies. Ombudsmen often work outside the bureaucratic system, encouraging and educating authorities to assist in the protection of frail long-term care residents. Long-term care regulations on state and federal levels are essential, but not adequate to ensure high quality of care and quality of life in facilities. Active community involvement and consumer advocacy is needed to fill the voids and assist in improving the attitude and performance of staff, management and owners.

For more information about the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, contact their Website at <http://www.ltombudsman.org> or call the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116.

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