

Nursing home woes catch ombudsman's eye; Complaints start to add up;

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While she thinks an investigation into the monitoring of nursing homes is a good idea, the CEO of St. Joseph's at Fleming wants the Ontario Ombudsman to also look at the "systemic issues" that affect quality of care.

"He's also going to have to look at adequate staffing and resources for homes as well. I think the review would have to include that to be fully meaningful," Debra Cooper Burger said yesterday.

Ombudsman Andre Marin announced the investigation yesterday.

According to a release, his office has received more than 100 complaints about long-term care since the spring and about 50 after recent media reports about nursing homes failing to meet government standards.

The investigation will concentrate on the Ministry of Health and Long-Term care. Unlike ombudsmen in other provinces, "Mr. Marin's mandate does not extend to nursing homes themselves," the release states.

The Canadian Press examined Ministry of Health inspection reports from April 2007 until March of this year and found some long-term care homes failed to meet at least some of the guidelines for basic care.

Locally, infractions were only noted at Extendicare Peterborough, Riverview Manor and Springdale Country Manor and ranged from missing documentation to unattended drug carts.

While there are no reports on recent infractions at St. Joseph's at Fleming, the **Canadian Union of Public Employees** has questioned those results.

Both St. Joseph's at Fleming officials and **CUPE** have asked the province to investigate union allegations that a staff member was asked to modify charts indicating how many baths were given to residents.

Burger said she asked for an investigation after reading Rennick's remarks in The Examiner on July 9.

"We're pretty open and transparent in terms of what we do here. I don't support the allegations, of course, and that's where I think the ministry could come in and do that kind of investigation," she said.

Candace Rennick, second vice-president of **CUPE** Ontario and president of Local 2280 representing St. Joseph's at Fleming workers, said she's pleased the ombudsman is investigating.

"We hope the ombudsman makes it clear that staff who come forward and tell their stories will be protected and won't have reprisals against them."

Rennick said it's an opportunity to "expose the flawed monitoring system that the government uses."

Peterborough MPP Jeff Leal also said he welcomes the ombudsman's investigation.

"As a government we're quite pleased that we brought in a system of reviewing long-term care homes in the province of Ontario. We were the first government to do so."

Last month a government commissioned report on long-term care in Ontario by St. Elizabeth Health Care CEO

Shirlee Sharkey made several recommendations regarding staffing and care standards.

Leal said new health minister David Caplan is reviewing those recommendations.

Leal also said he's been contacted by Rennick about the concerns at St. Joseph's at Fleming and they are meeting in August.

Complaints can be filed by calling 1-800-263-1830 or online at www.ombudsman.on.ca