

Intelligencer Journal/Lancaster New Era

Feds rate nursing homes

Agency says nonprofits here offer the best care Feds rate nursing homes Closer look

BY TOM MURSE, Staff Writer

Choosing a quality nursing home for yourself or your aging loved ones is a daunting task.



But new federal ratings of those facilities show an undeniable trend that should make it easier.



Nursing homes run by nonprofits far outperform those operated by for-profit companies, at least in Lancaster County, according to data compiled by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

Nearly half of the 31 nursing homes here are rated above average or much above average, and all but two are run by nonprofits, the ratings show.

"It is a phenomenon we've seen across the country, so it is not uncommon for you to see that in Lancaster," said Mary Kahn, a spokeswoman for the agency in Washington, D.C.

Calvary Fellowship Homes in Manheim Township, for example, is run by a nonprofit company. It received five stars -- the facility is considered "much above average" by the feds -- in the government's most recent ratings.

The star ratings, similar to those used for restaurants and hotels, are intended to help consumers, families and caregivers more easily compare nursing homes and help identify potential concerns. The more stars the better.

"Over the past number of months, I've probably had three or four people inquiring for a nursing bed who have made mention of looking online and seeing that we are a five-star-rated facility," said Cliff Hurter, the president of Calvary Fellowship Homes.

By contrast, every one of the lowest-rated nursing homes here is run by a for-profit company, according to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

Two such facilities are run by the same company -- Toledo, Ohio-based HCR ManorCare. Both ManorCare Health Services facilities, one in Lancaster and the other in Elizabethtown, received one out of five stars.

The company issued a statement in response to a reporter's inquiry saying the five-star rating system "fails to differentiate between the levels of care and services provided by the 17,000-plus skilled nursing centers in the United States.

"The system does not recognize that providers such as ManorCare that provide a very high level of comprehensive medical and intensive rehabilitation should be rated on different criteria than centers who provide a less complex level of care or who operate more as residential caretakers," the statement read.

ManorCare continued that the ratings are often out of date by the time they are made public by the government and also are too simplistic.

"We feel our centers provide quality care to the patients we serve and we strongly urge all patients and families to use this rating system as only one tool when considering a skilled nursing center," ManorCare said.

"Visiting the center, reviewing patient and family satisfaction surveys, asking about the expertise of the center to handle high-acuity patients or the specific

disease or injury, talking to families and patients about their stay, and requesting information on a center's results in meeting patient and family goals should be an integral part of any admission decision."

Calls to several other local nursing homes that fared poorly were referred to corporate spokespeople, who did not reply before press time.

The ratings are based on health inspections, staffing levels and quality-of-life measures such as the prevalence of pressure sores among residents or changes in their mobility.

The nursing homes included in the government's database include those that are certified to participate in Medicare or Medicaid. The ratings are for those facilities that provide skilled care for residents who need medical or nursing care, plus rehabilitation services for the injured, disabled and sick.

The data show:

• Nearly half, or 15, of the county's 31 nursing homes are rated above average or much above average. Of those, 13 are run by nonprofit entities and two are run by for-profit corporations.

• Eight nursing homes are rated average. Of those, five are run by nonprofits and three are run by for-profit entities.

• Seven nursing homes are rated much below average or just below average; all of those are operated by for-profit corporations.

Since the last report, in 2008, authorities have shut down one county nursing home, Village Vista Manor in Manor Township, because of problems with the quality of care and the facilities. The facility rated poorly in the federal ratings.

Another home, Maple Farm in Akron, changed hands. Because there are fewer than 12 to 15 months worth of data for Maple Farm, the government has not issued ratings for it.

Five local nursing homes have shown improvements in the last two years: Audubon Villa in Lititz, which went from two to five stars; Quarryville Presbyterian, which went from three to five stars; Garden Spot Village, which went from four to five stars; Ephrata Manor, which went from four to five stars; and Luther Acres Manor, which went from two to three stars.

Ten other facilities have seen their ratings fall: Fairmount Homes in Ephrata, from five to four stars; Homestead Village, Moravian Manor and Zerbe Sisters Nursing Center, each from four to three stars; Conestoga View, from four to two stars; Golden Living Center Lancaster, from four to one star; Hamilton Arms Center, from three to one star; Lancashire Hall and ManorCare Health Services-Elizabethtown, both from two to one star; and ManorCare Health Services-Lancaster, from three to one star.

Ratings for 15 others remained the same.

To compare nursing homes on the Web, go to <http://tinyurl.com/39a6mby>.

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