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More staff needed, not advisory committees

Letter to the Editor

While we join you in applauding nursing home companies that take meaningful steps toward improving quality of care ("Nursing Home Chains Take Worthy Quality Steps," Editors' Blog, www.mcknights.com, May 9, 2008; also, "Business Briefs," July 2008, p. 16), we do not understand why Carlyle-Manor Care merely set up a quality advisory committee rather than making the urgently needed improvements to staffing, wage, and benefit levels that would certainly improve care.

Any number of studies have already shows that a nursing home's staffing is the most important factor in determining quality of care. If Carlyle-Manor Care was truly committed to improving care, it would increase staffing and invest in front-line care immediately. Instead, the company appointed an advisory committee.

We are also far from confident that the company's committee can be the truly "independent" voice that Carlyle promised. Committee Member Dr. Gall Wilensky served on the ManorCare Board of Directors as recently as last year and received a one-day windfall of more than \$1 million as a result of Carlyle's buyout, according to SEC filings. Carlyle-ManorCare chose not to include this information in its press release.

Committee or not, now that the chain is backed by an \$81 billion private equity buyout giant, surely it can find the resources needed to improve staffing levels and bump up wages and benefits to invest in a professional, stable workforce. Yet as SEIU member caregivers bargain their first contract with Carlyle-ManorCare, the company has fought against reasonable requests related to training for caregivers and benefits for the nursing home's struggling workforce.

It is too bad that Carlyle-ManorCare is still playing a public relations game with an issue that is so important to residents' safety. A purely advisory committee does not help ManorCare's residents or workers who need Carlyle to do the right thing, right now.

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