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# The Hidden Danger: Neglect

Many Tasks Are Left Undone

SACRAMENTO, California

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Neglect is the silent killer in nursing homes. (CBS)

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(CBS) Nursing homes are home to a million and a half mostly elderly people. Millions more baby boomers can expect to spend their final days there. **CBS News Correspondent Vince Gonzales** continues an in-depth investigation into this country's nursing homes.

Velma Gagnon and her mother, Artie Wuebben, were always close. So when Gagnon could no longer care for her aging mother, she placed her in a nearby nursing home, Vacaville Convalescent and Rehabilitation Center, where she could visit every day.

But now Gagnon says, "I wish they were out of business."

Why? "They don't take care of their patients," she asserts. "My mother was there for two and a half years and neglected almost from the beginning."

Neglect is the silent killer in nursing homes. By some estimates, malnutrition, dehydration, bedsores and infection - caused by neglect - account for half of nursing home deaths and injuries.

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"Prisoners are treated better than our elderly," says Lesley Clement, who is representing the Wuebben family. As someone who specializes in nursing home cases, she says Wuebben was so badly neglected she slipped into a coma.

Emergency room doctors concluded she was "grossly dehydrated."

CBS News analyzed nursing home inspection reports and found more than 3,500 homes were cited last year for poor care that could cause dehydration. In almost 500 cases, patients were seriously injured or even died as a result.

"I know they killed her," Gagnon says. "I know they killed my mom."

But this is not what the medical records say. They show she was well cared for - and that's the problem. On some dates the staff notes she was out of bed and walking - quite a feat since she was still in a coma.

One report shows she was alert and received care on March 27 and 28. That was two days after she was already dead. Later, someone tried to white out the fake entries. [Click here](#) to view the Care Record.

"What this shows is that they are charting by rote, that they are not actually charting care that they're giving her. They're sitting down at the end of the week, and they're just filling in the boxes," Clement says.

Federal investigators say "false charting" is common. Workers at several other homes who make little more than minimum wage told CBS News it happens because the facilities are severely understaffed. They all asked CBS News to protect their identities.

"You get family members coming in (who) scream at you 'Why has my mother been sitting in

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feces for two hours?"

"We are not allowed to say 'because we're understaffed.' That's the reality of it, but we are directly told not to say that to families," the nurse says.

"The majority of the aides were overworked. I know that. They had too many patients to take care of at one time," says Gagnon. "It's a money thing. They don't want to hire. That comes out of their profits."

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CBS News tried to speak to Vacaville's administrator, Michael Kelly, but he refused.

Later Kelly's lawyer told CBS News, "Mr. Kelly and the facility deny responsibility for any harm that may have been done to Mrs. Wuebben."

"I feel very guilty to this day," Gagnon says. "I have felt like I had something to do with her death because I did leave her there."

Most families are unaware that the gravest threat facing nursing home residents is not what's done to them: It's what is not done for them.

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