

NEWS RELEASE

NCCNHR warns HHS Feeding Assistant Regulations Endanger Nursing Home Residents

WASHINGTON —The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) new regulations, released Friday, allowing paid "feeding assistants" in nursing homes are a "cynical attempt to avoid the nation's nursing home staffing crisis and related problems like resident malnutrition and dehydration," said Donna R. Lenhoff, executive director of the National Citizens' Coalition for Nursing Home Reform (NCCNHR).

"These regulations will allow workers who are virtually untrained to work virtually unsupervised with people who are frail, suffering from multiple medical conditions, and unable to feed themselves," Lenhoff said.

"Read these regulations carefully," Lenhoff said, "They would permit a 16-year-old on a wing without a single licensed nurse to perform the Heimlich maneuver on your 90-year-old grandmother if she choked. If she continued to choke or went into cardiac arrest? These regulations say this 16-year-old with eight hours of training in nursing care should ring the call bell for a nurse."

NCCNHR and other consumer groups do not oppose nursing homes hiring workers especially to provide assistance at mealtimes. "Our concern is that they be given at least the minimal training and screening that nurse aides get, and that they assist residents under the watchful eye of a trained nurse," Lenhoff said, "These regulations would actually allow feeding assistants to replace qualified nurse aides."

"It was NCCNHR that first called national attention to the widespread suffering of nursing home residents who do not receive adequate food and liquids," Lenhoff said. "But we are appalled by the attempt in these regulations to wipe out the modest progress made in the 1987 Nursing Home Reform Act to improve the quality of training and supervision in facilities that serve some of the most vulnerable Americans."

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