

A History of Celebrating Residents' Rights Week

One way to honor residents receiving long-term care is by celebrating Residents' Rights Week, the first full week of October (October 3-9, 2010). This is an opportunity to show tribute to residents and support ombudsmen, citizen advocates, facility staff and family members who work to promote and support residents' rights. Setting aside a week to focus on rights is an effective way to make sure that this important topic is never forgotten in your community, facility or state.

Residents' Rights Week is designated by the National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care* (Consumer Voice), each year to highlight residents living in all long-term care settings. It is a time to reflect on the importance of the Nursing Home Reform Law of 1987 that promises quality of life, quality of care and rights for each resident. During this week the Consumer Voice also gives special recognition to the work of thousands of individuals who collaborate daily to help assure that dignity, privacy and other basic human rights - often taken for granted in the community - are maintained as an integral part of the lives of residents living in long-term care settings.

Residents' Rights Week originated in 1981 at an annual meeting of the National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care. Several nursing home residents in attendance from across the United States decided that it would be special for all residents if time were set aside to celebrate residents and their rights, separate from annual National Nursing Home Week events always held in May. The Consumer Voice organized a successful petition drive to persuade Congress to designate a "Residents' Rights Day." Senator Claude Pepper (D-FL) and Senator David Pryor (D-AR) responded by introducing a Congressional Resolution for that purpose.

The Consumer Voice was also successful in making arrangements to take five nursing home residents to the White House to meet with President Jimmy Carter's Special Counselor on Aging, Dr. Harold Sheppard. The residents who attended were Janet Tulloch, Rae Spanover, Joan Knowlton, Ethel Gross and Virginia Caming (all now deceased).

Since 1981, the Consumer Voice has preserved this tradition of celebrating Residents' Rights, although we have extended the designation to a full week so that facility staff, family members, community advocates and ombudsmen will have flexible opportunities to conduct educational programs and festive events.

Thank you for working to make Residents' Rights Week special and meaningful for all involved. Please remember to share information about how you will be celebrating Residents' Rights Week. The Consumer Voice would like to highlight these celebrations on our website. If you have questions, please call us at (202) 332-2275, ext. 222.

*formerly NCCNHR