

Advancing Excellence: A Resident's Perspective on Quality

2007 Residents' Rights Week, October 7 – 13, 2007

by Alice H. Hedt, Executive Director
NCCNHR: The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care

“Quality Long-Term Care” is a phrase used by many of us who are dedicated to improving our long-term care system. We utilize quality measures and attempt to define quality for research purposes. Concerned family members, ombudsmen, citizen advocates, facility staff and others have as their goal quality of care and quality of life. Likewise, our organization now references quality in its new name and tag line – NCCNHR: The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care.

Residents' Rights Week 2007 reminds us that each of us and our organizations need to base our definition of quality on the resident experience. Individual residents in nursing homes, assisted living and board and care facilities should be defining what quality means to them as individuals in the care planning process, in resident council meetings and in discussions with facility staff. Good facilities will be engaging in conversations with residents about what quality means to them and using the input of residents to shape their total quality improvement. Excellent facilities will be creating opportunities for resident input during Residents' Rights Week and throughout the year.

Advocates understand that it must be residents and their family members who define quality. NCCNHR has always had residents on its Board of Directors to keep the organization focused on its mission. Many times in our 32 year history, the NCCNHR staff and board will be discussing a topic and having difficulty reaching consensus. Then a resident will remind us – sometimes forcefully, sometimes gently – that we need to get on task and spend our time working for quality instead of just talking about it.

In April, I had the opportunity to testify to the Senate Aging Committee about the Nursing Home Reform Law that was established twenty years ago. Many people were giving me advice about what to include in the five minute presentation. Other people were giving me articles to read and research to study. After a few worrisome days, I remembered the advice that NCCNHR's Founder Elma Holder gave me as a young ombudsman over 20 years ago – “Always go to the residents as the foundation of your individual and systemic advocacy.” So I started visiting residents and calling some residents who have been in facilities for a long time, asking them about their experiences with the Nursing Home Reform Law. Within a few days I had clarity about my presentation and more important, renewed clarity about what is important to residents – adequate numbers of trained staff with whom they can have relationships, an enforcement system that protects consumers,


and day to day living experiences in the facility that are based on the individual expressed needs and preferences of the resident (person directed care).

This years Residents' Rights Week theme *Advancing Excellence: A Resident's Perspective on Quality* challenges us to create opportunities to hear the resident voice during the week of October 7 – 13, 2007 and throughout the year. It encourages residents to speak up about what quality means in nursing homes, assisted living facilities, or board and care facilities. It also encourages facilities to value their residents' opinions and utilize their perspectives in their efforts to provide excellence in caregiving. And it reminds advocates that it is the resident definition of quality that should shape our work.

The 2007 theme supports the national multi-stakeholder campaign *Advancing Excellence in America's Nursing Homes* that is seeking to address staff turnover; promote consistent assignment; reduce restraints, pressure sores and pain; and seek resident and family input through satisfaction surveys. NCCNHR is calling upon all nursing homes to join this effort to improve nursing homes care Celebrating Residents' Rights Week 2007 is an opportunity for all long-term care facilities including nursing homes involved in this national campaign - to engage in meaningful and important dialogue with residents.

I look forward to seeing the entries to NCCNHR's 2007 national challenge that gives residents the opportunity to highlight their definitions of quality in poetry, photography and art. Let us know about similar challenges you organize in facilities in your communities and state. We also hope that you will use the four focused activities included in this packet to create additional opportunities to hear the resident voice. NCCNHR will be highlighting some of the local and state activities on our webpage so send information about what you are doing to jmeashey@nccnhr.org.

Finally, a heartfelt thank you to each of you who works tirelessly to promote residents' rights and individualized, person directed long-term care. This is a difficult task and there is much more work to be done. Let's use Residents' Rights Week 2007 as an opportunity to step back for a moment, enjoy moments of creativity and discussion with residents, and renew our commitment to quality.



Alice H. Hedt, NCCNHR Executive Director

*To get ideas about Residents Rights Week 2007 go to www.nccnhr.org

*To learn about the *Advancing Excellence in America's Nursing Homes* Campaign go to <http://www.nhqualitycampaign.org/> and to http://www.nccnhr.org/public/245_1266_13315.cfm

*To set forth your own definition of quality for when you will need caregiving visit: <http://www.nccnhr.org/uploads/QualLivingPersonalDirs.pdf>