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February 9, 2008

Kern County Long Term Care  
Ombudsman Program  
615 California Ave.  
Bakersfield, CA 93304

Attn: Nona Tolentino

Regarding: Complaint concerning Betty Deem

Dear Nona,

Thank you for your phone call, notifying me of a complaint made by a bystander on Betty's behalf, concerning the events that took place in the parking lot of Dr. [REDACTED] office on November 9, 2007.

This is a direct response, to ensure a written record and provide complete information on the circumstances surrounding that event.

I am no stranger to the mission and value of service that Ombudsman provide the elderly. Your organization provided assistance in obtaining information regarding Betty's care in 2005, of which I am very grateful. That is part of the reason I am writing to you today. I know your intent is to champion adequate elder care.

I was not in that parking lot on November 9, however:

- I do know that Betty had been experiencing rapid-failing health since September.
- I do know the only ones concerned about this were her caretakers at Westchester Gardens and the family. The doctor, or P.A. rather as she never got to actually see Dr. [REDACTED] assured the caregivers and myself that Betty was "fine, just fine". Didn't matter if she couldn't walk anymore, or function. According to the P.A., her condition hadn't changed. She was assigned to hospice on December 1, 2007, at the family's insistence.
- Which brings us to the reason Betty was in that parking lot on November 9, 2007. It was Westchester Gardens staff that insisted the P.A. address her rapidly-deteriorating condition – which the P.A. refused to, by the way. The Westchester Gardens staff cared about Betty's comfort and quality of life; just as they had when she arrived 2-1/2 years ago with a broken leg, courtesy of [REDACTED] Skilled Nursing. They got her ambulatory. They provided nutritious and tasty meals. The quality of her life at Westchester Gardens was better than the prior 15 years she lived at home alone. This was her opinion, as well as mine.

- I do know that Betty is a “screamer”. She did not like to be bathed, touched, or asked to move. When this occurred, she screamed – loudly. It wasn’t about pain or discomfort; it’s just what she did. She did it with the family, and I’m sure on a regular basis at Westchester Gardens. They were able to go beyond her hollering to do what was best for her, in spite of her protests. I know this could not have been pleasant for the staff, but they always handled her in a kind and caring manner. In fact, they remarked “it would be a lot quieter around there, without Betty”, when we finally were forced by the state to move her.
- I do know that Westchester Gardens attempted to keep Betty through her end-of-life care, even though she needed a higher level of care than they were licensed to provide. That probably accounts for the clumsy handling of her in the parking lot. They wanted her to be able to remain in her home. Hospice agreed, and offered to provide the additional care required, so that she wouldn’t have to be moved. But the state would have none of that. It’s not about what’s best for her, but the rules that count. As she was expected to live more than a week or two, I was forced to move her.
- I know you tried to explain to me she would be getting better care in skilled nursing, but that’s not what I saw. They may have more staff, but that doesn’t mean they venture beyond the nurses’ station. Not one person came to greet or welcome her when the ambulance dropped her off. In fact, the ambulance driver tried to get me to sign for the transfer, as no one was around, and they were ready to leave. Dirty linens were on the floor at 8 pm that night, along with the mattress that got replaced, blocking the closet intended for her belongings. Didn’t matter, they were using her closet for storage. I could just move things out of my way. In the entire time my family and I visited Westchester Gardens, there was never dirty clothing or linens lying on the floor or anywhere else. They kept that place clean.

So, I am not surprised that Betty passed away last night – exactly one week after being moved to ██████████ Skilled Nursing Facility. She was expected to live at least another two months. But that was only if she’d been allowed to stay with the caring people of Westchester Gardens.

I could not bear to think that anything relating to Betty would have a negative impact on the staff and owners of Westchester Gardens. They treated her with dignity and respect always. For that, I will always be grateful. Please make sure this goes “on the record”.

Thank you for the job your organization undertakes. It’s a huge one.  
Sincerely yours,

*Lisa P. Deem Edmonson*

Lisa P. Deem-Edmonson,  
POA for Betty J. Deem

Cc: Westchester Gardens ~