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Washington, D.C. A new report released by the National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care (Consumer Voice) examines reasons why nursing home residents may suffer harm when their nursing home closes and identifies ways to reduce or eliminate such harm. The study found that major obstacles to a successful transition include lack of appropriate and nearby placements or providers who do not want to take a specific resident; poor discharge planning; and lack of communication and time to find new placements for residents. These are serious barriers, but innovative strategies and practices in several states appear to have the potential to address these issues. The report discusses these practices and recommends actions that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), state agencies and State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs can take to better protect nursing home residents facing relocation.

To conduct the study, data was obtained through online surveys and interviews from state and local long-term care ombudsmen, advocates, residents, families, and state and federal officials.

The report describes what can happen to residents when they are not adequately protected during a nursing home closure. According to a statement from one local ombudsman who observed a facility closing, resident belongings were put into trash bags; possessions, charts and medication were not sent with the residents to the receiving facility; and residents were being moved without telling their families where they were going. Most ombudsmen, advocates, residents, and families in the study concluded that these transfers were dreadful and problematic.

Study respondents also shared what they saw as barriers to a successful transition and ideas for improving the closure process. One of the keys to success regardless of whether a facility closing was voluntary or involuntary was ombudsman notification and active involvement.

An important focus of the study were the best practices around closure that three states - Connecticut, Ohio and Wisconsin - have established. Each of these states has practices that overcome obstacles identified by study respondents. Across the three states there are common strategies being used to minimize the harm of closure on residents, such as developing processes for timely communication with residents and families; delineating roles and responsibilities for all state agencies; and creation of state-developed closure manuals that outline the process to be followed by the closing facility as well as the state agencies and programs overseeing the closure.

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*The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care (formerly NCCNHR) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership organization founded in 1975 by Elma L. Holder that advocates for quality care and quality of life for consumers in all long-term-care settings.*

Based on the study's findings, the report presents numerous recommendations to CMS, state regulatory agencies and long-term care ombudsmen. One of the top recommendations is for CMS to require and state agencies to create relocation teams consisting of all relevant state agencies/programs, including the state regulatory agency and the Office of the State Long Term Care Ombudsman. The team should meet on a regular basis, be on-site during closure and adopt the best practice strategies common to Connecticut, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

According to Lori Smetanka, Executive Director of Consumer Voice, improvements to the closure process are needed now. Smetanka stated, "Better policies and systems must be implemented to achieve well planned, resident-centered discharge planning when a facility closes. The risk to residents is too high. We hope this report serves as a catalyst to change."

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