

Not all nursing homes fall short

Helen Sims, the owner and CEO of Superior Care Home in Paducah, was not happy after reading our paper last Sunday.

We carried an editorial from the Lexington Herald-Leader headlined: “SHAMEFUL: State’s nursing home problems a matter of life, death.”

It summarized a recent series in the Lexington paper that found 43 percent of Kentucky’s 284 nursing homes were rated either “below average” or “much below average” by the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

The stories further reported the state’s nursing homes collectively were rated among the worst in the nation in recent studies by the Kaiser Family Foundation, the AARP and the advocacy group Families for Better Care.

Sims sent me an email to say the public shouldn’t be led to believe that every nursing home is deficient and invited me to pay a visit and take a tour.

I was glad to take her up on it, and I came away with the sense that Superior Care does in fact live up to its name.

The nursing home was opened in 1972 on Clay Street in Paducah by Sims’ mother, Mary Ellen Thompson.

In 2014, it relocated to a new, \$14 million campus on the city’s western edge off Blandville Road. At 72,000 square feet, the new facility has 108 beds and is more than twice the size of the previous location.

Superior Care is one of four nursing homes in Paducah and the only one with an above-average overall rating from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

The state Cabinet for Health and Family Services does a comprehensive, four-day review of nursing



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homes annually. Even the best nursing homes will usually be dinged for a deficiency or two, but Superior Care this year received a zero deficiency rating for the first time in 15 years.

While Sims is proud of that, she’s more proud that the nursing home maintains high standards consistently.

“We don’t want to work to get ready for a survey,” she said. “We want to be there every day.”

The nursing home has four “neighborhoods” for different patient categories — two for rehabilitation, one for long-term care and one for memory care. They have their own living-dining room, kitchen and rehab gym.

During my brief tour, I was impressed by the home’s hospital-clean appearance and the staff’s friendly demeanor. The day’s lunch menu looked healthy and delicious. It was easy to imagine residents feeling comfortable there.

The majority of the state’s nursing homes have corporate ownership. State inspections have found many with caregivers stretched too thin by low staffing levels.

Sims believes being privately owned and having a more personal connection with residents is a big factor in Superior Care’s favor.

Now in her 35th year full-time at Superior Care, she shares management leadership with her son, Mike. Both voiced praise for the

dedication of their 150-person staff, including some who have worked there two decades or more.

“I’ve always tried to follow my mother’s philosophy that when you give you gather,” she said. “We don’t cut corners. When I go home at night and put my head on a pillow, I can go to sleep knowing these people are well-cared for.”

The Lexington paper’s nursing home series reported several distressing cases of substandard care, including two in Paducah.

One involved the negligent care of a resident at McCracken Nursing and Rehabilitation and efforts to cover up a serious injury sustained there. A civil suit on behalf of Cecil Gary, a 60-year-old stroke victim, went to trial last year, and the jury returned a \$28 million verdict against the Texas-based owner, which led to a bankruptcy filing.

The other case involved a resident at Stonecreek Health and Rehabilitation in 2015 who was screaming about pain from a neglected urinary catheter, which caused an infection that later required emergency hospitalization. A state inspection found that the staff responded by removing his speaking valve, a plastic prosthesis in his throat, to render him mute.

While such extreme incidents may be rare, the low ratings of a large percentage of nursing homes in this state are a critical problem. As the editorial stated, “The 34,000 residents of Kentucky’s long-term care facilities are among the state’s most vulnerable people — physically, mentally, emotionally and financially. What is happening to many of them is a scandal.”

It felt good to visit a place that operates on a higher level.

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