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Letters to the Editor

Keep spotlight on nursing home abuse

Re the story by Diane C. Lade about the Munne Center assisted living facility south of Miami evicting residents without due process (Feb. 9): The power of the press in bringing about a safer environment for our elderly and frail citizens cannot be overemphasized. Long-term care facilities spend a lot of money to make sure that their beds are full. They know very well that bad publicity translates into the anathema of empty beds. Stories like this one are an effective control of bad behavior.

Legislators such as state Sen. Ronda Storms, R-Brandon, who is contemplating legislation to require facilities to give a reason for discharge, should be spurred on by you to add more protective measures. Legislators are under immense pressure from the many long-term care lobbyists who swarm their offices. Your support will give her the needed courage to do the right thing.

Involuntarily discharging a resident is a grave matter. The elderly do not transplant well. Serious setbacks and even death may occur from what is known as "transfer trauma." There are only three acceptable reasons for asking a resident to leave: The facility can no longer meet the resident's needs, the resident or Medicaid has failed to pay the bill, or the resident is a danger to him/herself or to others. The burden of proof should always be on the facility to prove its case, which should be done at a proper hearing where legal assistance is provided for residents who cannot afford an attorney.

Because there are good profits to be made and there is a lack of oversight, far too many unscrupulous characters go into this serious business. Taking up residence in an assisted living facility is not a choice for most people. They are there because they have needs that the facility has agreed to meet. When a resident or the family complain about needs that are not met as agreed, the facility all too often asks them to leave.

Threat of eviction has a chilling, silencing effect on families who usually have no other choice for placement. The usual laws of the marketplace do not apply to long-term care.

Violette King is president of Nursing Home Monitors, a non-profit, all-volunteer advocacy group for nursing home safety.