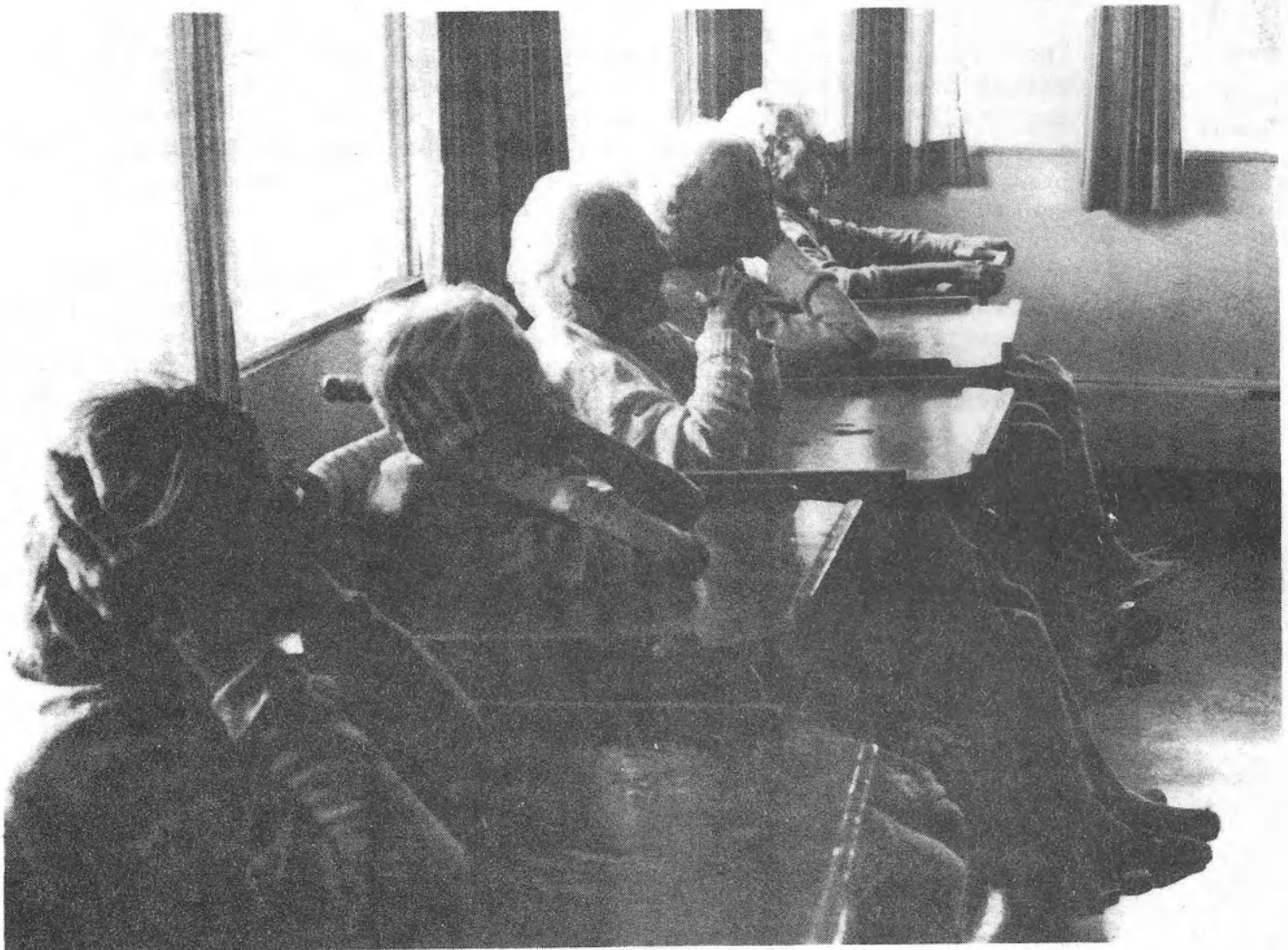


GREENACRES

REPORT BY CUPE LOCAL 79
ON THE SITUATION IN
GREENACRES HOME FOR THE AGED



Nursing Attendants

Nursing Attendants are the residents' lifeline. They get the residents up in the morning, change those who are incontinent, dress them, lift them into wheelchairs, give them liquids, hand out meals (many residents are on special diets), stir sugar in tea, cut up the food for some, and feed those who cannot feed themselves. Nursing Attendants lift residents from wheelchairs to the toilet after every meal, and lift them back to their wheelchairs; lift them from wheelchairs to the bath, bathe them, dry and dress them, and lift them back into wheelchairs. They sponge-bathe and change the incontinent pads of residents who are bedridden, put creams on tender skins, adjust beds; they walk those who can walk only with assistance. They change the bed linen, wipe down wheelchairs, empty waste, and sterilize bedpans and urinals. Nursing Attendants also prepare bodies for the morgue.

They undress residents and help them into their nightclothes, give enemas, push wheelchairs, find lost slippers, steer wandering residents towards a destination; and if there is time, they spend a few minutes talking to people whose days are lonely and isolated.

On weekends there are never enough Nursing Attendants to do the work. An example is a floor of 80 residents with only four Nursing Attendants during the dayshift on a Saturday. It is simply impossible for that number of staff to give the complete care that residents require.

During the week all floors are not covered adequately. No provision is made to fill in for Nursing Attendants who are sick or on Workmen's Compensation. Remaining staff, whose normal workload is already heavy, must simply bear the burden. The work isn't the kind that can be postponed, and so Nursing Attendants are forced to hurry from resident to resident. They dislike being placed in a situation that forces them to respond to residents as if they were on a production line at a factory.

Night staff are responsible for getting as many residents as possible up before the day staff's shift begins. The large number of residents each Nursing Attendant must change, dress, and lift into wheelchairs means that staff must begin waking residents before sunrise, something neither they nor the residents enjoy. For night staff especially, there is the ever-present knowledge that in case of a fire or other emergency, there simply aren't enough staff on hand to care for residents who are quite helpless.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

YOUR COMMITTEE SHOULD RECOMMEND THAT METRO COUNCIL ALLOCATE ADDITIONAL PERMANENT NURSING ATTENDANT POSITIONS TO GREENACRES IN ORDER TO ENSURE THAT THE RESIDENTS RECEIVE THE CONSISTENTLY FULL CARE AND ATTENTION THEY NEED.

Registered Nursing Assistants

The total number of Registered Nurses in Greenacres has recently been reduced, and a new position, Registered Nursing Assistant, has been added. A number of Registered Nursing Assistants who have successfully completed a Drug Course are presently qualified to prepare and administer medications under the supervision of a Registered Nurse. Although at least ten Registered Nursing Assistants at Greenacres fall into this category, the new procedure for administering drugs has not been put into place there. Making use of the skills of Registered Nursing Assistants would help to reduce the volume of work which Registered Nurses must now do, and would enable the Registered Nursing Assistants to make full use of their training.

RECOMMENDATION 8:

YOUR COMMITTEE SHOULD REQUEST THAT THE MANAGEMENT AT GREENACRES BEGIN NOW TO PHASE IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF MEDICATIONS BY REGISTERED NURSING ASSISTANTS.

C. STAFFING PROBLEMS IN THE HOUSEKEEPING DIVISION

The Housekeeping Division includes Housekeeping Attendants, who are responsible for collecting and distributing all of the linen and uniforms, and who also wash all of the residents' clothes; male porters, who sort heavy laundry, handle deliveries, and do the heavy-duty cleaning throughout the Home; and female Light Duty Cleaners, who perform general cleaning duties throughout the Home.

As in the Nursing Division, there are not enough permanent staff to do the work. This puts especially heavy demands on the staff, because the physical structure of the building is old and the furnishings are deteriorating. The building certainly isn't as clean as some of the other Homes are, and there are the added problems of rodents and cockroaches to contend with.

The Administration, presumably because of the restraints of the budget, uses temporary Porters to do some of the work. These men are hired for four months, laid off for two weeks, and then rehired to work another four-month stretch. While the temporary Porters are on their lay-off period, regular staff must do the extra work. At these times, the female Light Duty Cleaners are sometimes assigned to perform the male Porters' duties.

The workload definitely warrants hiring additional permanent Housekeeping staff. It is clear that temporary employees are hired, not because the workload is likely to decrease sometime in the future, but because Metro considers it to be financially advantageous to hire temporaries. That way Metro is not required to give the employees the benefits which permanent employees receive.

Because of the poor condition of the bathing and toilet areas on each floor, and because residents are taken to the toilet and sometimes bathed before they go to bed, these areas need to be washed down in the evening. Yet there are no Porters assigned to the afternoon shift or night shift. On one floor, a male resident, recognizing there's work to be done and no staff to do it, cheerfully mops around the toilet area every evening.

Also, laundry which used to be done on the premises at Greenacres has been contracted out to a private company. The private company initially washed the residents' clothing as well as the linen and staff uniforms, but so many clothes were lost or battered that two washing machines and two dryers had to be installed. Housekeeping Attendants now wash as well as mend all of the residents' personal clothing. They also wash some of the blankets, because the private laundry shrinks them so badly. In spite of the additional workload - clothes for 560 people - no additional staff have been hired.

RECOMMENDATION 9:

YOUR COMMITTEE SHOULD RECOMMEND THAT METRO COUNCIL ALLOCATE ADDITIONAL PERMANENT POSITIONS TO THE HOUSEKEEPING DIVISION AT GREENACRES, AND THAT THESE POSITIONS BE FILLED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

D. ON-THE-JOB INJURIES

One measure of the conditions in a Home for the Aged is the number of lost-time injuries that occur on the job.

There were 45 lost-time injuries at Greenacres in the first seven months of this year; 27 of them were back injuries. On a per-employee basis, Greenacres has the highest percentage (12%) of injuries of any Metro Home for the Aged, and an unusually high proportion of back injuries.

It can be argued that "accidents" are not in fact random and unpredictable, and that they occur and are to an extent inevitable when particular conditions exist.

A large part of a Nursing Attendant's job is lifting: lifting residents from bed to wheelchair, from wheelchair to toilet, from toilet back to wheelchair, from wheelchair to bathtub, etc. If a floor is not fully staffed, the work still has to be done, and one Nursing Attendant must lift even heavy residents on her own. "Hoyer" lifts, which require the passive cooperation of the resident, are simply not appropriate for some types of residents at Greenacres.

Many residents are agitated and fearful, particularly when it is time for their weekly bath. They must be coaxed into cooperating and convinced that they'll feel better if they're clean. That takes patience and 15 to 20 minutes of persuasion. Although Nursing Attendants have infinite patience, they have very little time because floors are short-staffed. When residents feel hurried, they often react in anger, and Nursing Attendants find themselves ducking punches.

This is the sort of hazard that could be reduced by increasing the number of staff so employees aren't forced to rush the residents.

Short-staffing is one circumstance that is bound to precipitate "accidents" in a Home. Poor equipment and lack of supplies also contribute to an accident-prone environment. This problem is outlined in Section E (below).

Accidents are also bound to happen when employees are not sufficiently prepared for the job. New nursing staff are given only a morning's introduction before they are assigned to a floor. New staff need to be trained, especially in the techniques of lifting properly. They also should be taught about the special needs of psycho-geriatric residents so that they can anticipate problems and respond quickly, with understanding. Better preparation would mean fewer injuries.

RECOMMENDATION 10.

YOUR COMMITTEE SHOULD REQUEST THAT THE COMMISSIONER OF COMMUNITY SERVICES, IN CONSULTATION WITH THE ADMINISTRATION AT GREENACRES, DESIGN AND PROVIDE A COMPREHENSIVE TRAINING PROGRAM WHICH IS AIMED AT AVOIDING STAFF INJURIES.

E. SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT

Staff is not the only resource in short supply at Greenacres. The broken-down equipment and the lack of supplies contribute to the feeling of scarcity that pervades the long corridors of the building.

Residents in some rooms have rolled bed linens up against the window ledges to stop the drafts. Many of the bedspreads at Greenacres are cast-offs from other Homes. There isn't a sufficient inventory of blankets; the private laundry has shrunk many to the point where they don't cover the bed, and, though it's November, not all beds have two blankets, as required.

Nursing Attendants spend precious time searching for cotton stockings for the women, and there are never enough shoes to go around, nor is there enough underwear. Many clothes have been donated by staff, who raid closets at home for shirts for the men and dresses for the ladies. The private laundry's deliveries are variable, and when gowns don't arrive in the early morning, Nursing Attendants wrap residents in sheets until supplies arrive.

There are no face cloths to sponge or bathe the residents; Nursing Attendants are told to use brown paper towels, rough on sensitive, aging skin. Few linen bags are available, and Nursing Attendants have to tie up dirty linen in sheets. Dilapidated linen buggies are held together with old stockings. Not all floors have proper nursing care carts to hold supplies; Nursing Attendants must pile everything on stretcher carts and make their rounds. The brakes on some wheelchairs don't work. The trays on some of the geriatric chairs don't fit.

Supplies are so short that R.N.'s are told to break wooden tongue depressors in two, and to use half at a time when administering medications. Disposable medicine cups are washed, and re-used.

Nursing Attendants should wear gloves when giving enemas or treating residents with scabies, but gloves are a rarity. Only one floor has what might be called acceptable toilet facilities. Toilet and bathing areas are cramped and in poor repair, without ventilation. None of the bedpan sterilizers work properly, and Nursing Attendants have little choice but to wash bedpans and urinals in the bathtubs and sinks.

On one floor there is no area for preparing the evening nourishment for residents, and Nursing Attendants prepare sandwiches and drinks on a desk, or bedside table. On special occasions Adjuvants bring in their own tapes and radios to provide music for the residents

In the kitchen the rims of pots are battered, and pans are worn. There aren't enough washing racks to hold the dishes and there are no racks to accommodate large plates, which have to be forced in and pried out. The second-hand dishwasher doesn't always work. Tea towels are scarce; sometimes there aren't any, and staff have to use rags, old underwear and pajamas, to dry cutlery.

Time spent hunting for clothes, time consumed in making do with poor equipment, is time that belongs to the residents and should be spent in giving them the personal care they require. Employees at Greenacres are resourceful and manage to cope with the limitations imposed upon them, but they, and the residents, deserve much better.

RECOMMENDATION 11:

YOUR COMMITTEE SHOULD RECOMMEND THAT METRO COUNCIL PROVIDE FUNDS FROM THE CONTINGENCY ACCOUNT IMMEDIATELY FOR EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES AT GREENACRES - CLOTHES FOR RESIDENTS, UNDERWEAR, SHOES AND SLIPPERS, FACE CLOTHS, NEW BLANKETS, NURSING GLOVES, NURSING CARE CARTS, LINEN BAGS, LINEN BUGGIES, BEDPAN STERILIZERS, KITCHEN POTS, RACKS FOR WASHING DISHES, AND TEA TOWELS.

F. CONCLUSION

This report has outlined the shortage of staff and lack of supplies and equipment at Greenacres, and has touched on the ways in which these problems affect the level of care which Local 79 members are able to give to the residents. Employees at Greenacres are distressed and indignant, because they are forced into situations where they can give only minimal custodial care to the residents. They know the old people require more and deserve better. Greenacres Home for the Aged urgently needs Metro's full attention.