



The Schroer Group

Altercare Integrated Health Services
February 26, 2019

Dear Family and Friends,

Recently, our organization has felt the full fury of a social media storm.

We understand how two pictures posted on Facebook of a resident in our Altercare of Nobles Pond facility could be perceived by someone suddenly seeing it on Facebook, with no explanation or context. The pictures show the resident in a wheelchair, with her head resting on a pillow on a desk. The accompanying text accused us of neglect, saying our patient was in distress and our staffers were not responsive.

Nothing is more important to us than the care, comfort and safety of our residents and patients.

But those pictures and words, representing a snapshot in time that don't reflect the reality of the situation, have been shared across Facebook more than 100,000 times as I write this. And therein lie the potential hazards of social media today.

The Facebook post and the related shares have triggered calls and comments into our skilled nursing facility and online that have been filled with hate and included threats to our coworkers, who commit their careers to caring for others. These calls and comments brought fear into the lives of our residents and their families, as well as staffers and their families – all of whom consider our facility a part of their lives.

I must set the record straight on this situation – and I will do so with facts that can be substantiated with the Ohio Department of Health and Ohio Department of Aging Long-term Care Ombudsman. Both of these organizations have investigated this situation and how we provide care at Nobles Pond.

In this case, the patient, who remains in our care, was being moved from a semi-private to a private room, for her and her family's comfort. The equipment needed to safely place this patient in bed was not yet ready. While she waited, the patient was observed by four aides, two nurses, three dietary staffers and one therapist. The patient is more comfortable leaning forward when sitting, so nursing staff put a pillow in her lap. During this waiting period, we believe the patient herself placed the pillow on the desk and laid her head on it. Given that she was comfortable in that position, our staffers continued to observe her. Indeed, a physical therapy assistant rubbed the patient's back, prayed with her and made sure she was warm and in no distress. She simply was not left alone for any extended time.

Again, these are independently verifiable facts.

As so often now seems to happen with social media, though, the post attracted further attention from TV news stations and media outlets, locally and in other states, including shows carried on

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national networks. Among media, to our knowledge, only our local Canton Repository and Massillon Independent waited for an independent third party to weigh in before reporting.

That third party – the Ohio Department of Health – sent an investigator who spent about 10 hours in our facility. The claims in the Facebook post were not substantiated. In the opinion of the official, independent regulator, our staff provided the appropriate level of care. While that investigation is not finalized, we are confident the final report will affirm the investigator’s findings.

When a loved one is receiving care in a skilled nursing facility, it can be an emotional, scary time for the patient and family. We at Altercare are blessed to have staff members who are committed to caring for people in need.

We spend countless hours implementing systems designed around best practices to ensure that we do our work consistently and with excellence. We also have a 46-year history of family business values and the highest ethical standards. We live by those standards and every day we strive to live up to our history.

We invest in monthly training and the latest technology and business intelligence to equip our more than 3,000 employees with the skills and tools they need to provide the highest level of care. Families entrust their loved ones to our team and we work diligently to deliver compassionate, professional service and the best outcomes in our respective markets.

We also know that no skilled nursing facility is perfect. So when questions or issues are raised, we respond. We immediately reported this situation to the Ohio Department of Health. We continue our own investigation, and if there are improvements to be made, we’ll make them immediately.

I stand with the person who made the original post regarding the importance of properly caring for residents. Our frail and elderly residents deserve to be cared for well, and we need to do all we can to prevent abuse and neglect from happening – in the home, in assisted-living environments and in skilled nursing facilities. Our local Area Agency on Aging supports our elderly and at the same time seeks appropriate placements for all elderly, no matter their need.

While I agree with the person who made this post regarding preventing elder abuse, I disagree with how her perspective became the only perspective embraced and shared through social media and the media outlets. We all can do better – we must do better – to investigate the facts and evaluate the truth before posting or sharing on social media.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jerry", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Gerald F. Schroer, Jr.
CEO, The Schroer Group