

Introduction

In the spring of 2002 the New York State Commissioners of Health and Mental Health and the Chair of the Commission on Quality of Care for the Mental Disabled created a workgroup to review Adult Care Facility policies, programs and financing. One of the recommendations to improve quality of life for residents of adult homes included a more aggressive or at least more visible role for the New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA) long term care ombudsman program (LTCOP).

Traditionally, ombudsman have played a larger role in nursing home than in adult care homes. Some coordinators and some volunteers, lacking experience in adult homes or in assisting individuals with a mental illness diagnosis, expressed concern about their ability to advocate effectively for adult home residents. The ombudsman recognized that although their advocacy role in the adult home might be essentially unchanged, the situations they were likely to encounter would require new knowledge, skills and attitudes in order for them to be effective. Their request for training led to the development of this manual.

The goals of this program are two fold: first, to increase the personal comfort and confidence of ombudsman in their abilities to work effectively with residents living in adult homes who have multiple, chronic health problems (both mental and physical); and by doing so, to increase their ability to advocate effectively *for* and *with* residents living in adult homes. It is expected that this advocacy will occur at both the individual and systems levels. While special emphasis is placed on advocacy in adult homes, much of the information is relevant across settings.

About the Author

Susan Wehry, M.D is an Associate Professor at the University of Vermont College of Medicine and Consultant to the Departments of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities and Aging and Disabilities. Currently she is serving as the interim Medical Director for the Vermont State Hospital.

A board-certified community psychiatrist with added qualifications in geriatric psychiatry, Dr. Wehry is a member of both the American Association of Geriatric Psychiatrists (AAGP) International Psychogeriatrics Association (IPA). She was a featured speaker at the 2003 NCCNHR conference and has trained ombudsman from Maine to Louisiana on a variety of topics including successful aging, depression, dementia and supporting the mental health of residents in the long term care setting.

Dr. Wehry is honored to have received the NYS LTCOP 2002 Paul D. Vanas award recognizing her commitment to excellence in long-term care.

Acknowledgements

This manual would not have been possible without the joint efforts of the New York State Office for the Aging's Long Term Care Ombudsman Program and Commission on Quality Care for the Mentally Disabled and the leadership of Faith Fish and her successor, Marty Haase, NYS Long Term Care Ombudsman. The advisory board created to oversee the project offered invaluable information, suggestions, corrections and encouragement. The members of this group are listed on the following page.

The author also wishes to thank Wanda Troche, Project Coordinator and the LTCOP staff for their patience and dedication in seeing this project through to its completion.

Advisory Board Members

Joan Burke
Family Service League

Ken Chappell
Albany Red Cross of North Eastern NY

Dr. Beth Dichter
NYS Department of Health
Office of Continuing Care

Geoff Lieberman
CIAD

Robert Melby
Carol J. Ackerman, RN, M.S.
Karen Myers-Malcolm
Lisa A. Murray
Commission on Quality Care for the Mentally Disabled

Joseph Reilly
NYS Office of Mental Health
Adult Home Bureau

Harvey Rosenthal
Andy Lawner
New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services

David Seay
National Alliance of the Mentally Ill of NYS

Linda Tremblay
Gary Weiskopf
NYS Conference of Local Mental Hygiene Directors

Susan Wehry, M.D.
Contact information
swehry@ddmhs.state.vt.us or
Department of Psychiatry
University Health Center
1 South Prospect Street
Burlington, VT 05401
(802) 241-1458