



Ombudsman Saskatchewan

Promoting Fairness

Backgrounder

Taking Care: An Ombudsman investigation into the care provided to Margaret Warholm while a resident of the Santa Maria Senior Citizens Home

ISSUES INVESTIGATED

We investigated the quality of care standards that were in place while Margaret Warholm was a resident at Santa Maria and considered whether they were followed in her case. We also investigated how the Ministry's, the Region's and Santa Maria's responsibilities are established and whether they are effectively enforced through sound accountability measures in the long-term care system. We did not, nor do we have the authority to, investigate the clinical decisions made by health care professionals regarding Margaret's care. Our role was to examine whether there were reasonable administrative processes in place to provide Margaret with high quality care, and if so, whether they were followed in her case. Specifically, our report addressed the following issues:

1. Did Margaret's care meet the standards in the Ministry's *Program Guidelines for Special-care Homes* and Santa Maria's own policies and procedures?
2. Are there clear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities in the long-term care system to ensure appropriate standards of care are met?
3. Are there effective processes in place for addressing the concerns of residents and their families?
4. Are there other factors that could affect the quality of long-term care?

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding

Santa Maria staff did not ensure Margaret's skin was free of bedsores as required. They also did not refer her to the Wound Care Centre as required, nor report her stage 3 or higher bedsores to the Region as required.

RECOMMENDATION 1

That Santa Maria Senior Citizens Home implement a process to ensure that its staff:

- a) Can identify, manage and treat bedsores.
- b) Understand that they must pay particular attention to advanced or complicated bedsores and know when to consult external resources about treatment.
- c) Follow prescribed care plans when caring for bedsores.
- d) Are aware of the duty to report bedsores as required by standard 17.1 of the *Program Guidelines for Special-care Homes*.

Finding

Santa Maria did not ensure that Margaret's care was accurately recorded in her chart, as required.

RECOMMENDATION 2

That Santa Maria Senior Citizens Home implement a process to ensure residents' charts are up to date and that staff know when and what to chart, in accordance with standards 16.1 and 16.2 of the *Program Guidelines for Special-care Homes*.

Finding

Santa Maria did not meet the Ministry's Guidelines for ensuring Margaret received adequate nutrition and fluids.

RECOMMENDATION 3

That Santa Maria Senior Citizens Home implement a process to ensure that residents receive adequate hydration and nutrition in accordance with standard 13.5 of the *Program Guidelines for Special-care Homes*.

Finding

Santa Maria did not take appropriate steps to effectively flag and address Margaret's significant weight loss.

RECOMMENDATION 4

That Santa Maria Senior Citizens Home implement a process to ensure that when a resident's weight change exceeds a certain threshold (established in consultation with a dietician) that it be reported to the Director of Care (or equivalent), as well as the resident and family, so that any appropriate interventions can be considered and agreed upon.

Finding

Santa Maria did not update Margaret's care plan as frequently as would reasonably be expected given her significant weight loss, the appearance of her bedsores and her overall deterioration.

RECOMMENDATION 5

That Santa Maria Senior Citizens Home audit residents' charts and care plans in accordance with its *Quality Assurance* policy (NUR 9.3).

RECOMMENDATION 6

That Santa Maria Senior Citizens Home implement a process to ensure that care plans are reviewed and updated in accordance with standard 15.5 of the *Program Guidelines for Special-care Homes*.

Finding

Santa Maria did not effectively manage Margaret's pain.

RECOMMENDATION 7

That Santa Maria Senior Citizens Home implement a process to ensure effective recognition, assessment and management of residents' pain in accordance with standard 1.4 of the *Program Guidelines for Special-care Homes*.

Finding

There is no consensus among Santa Maria staff and between Santa Maria and the Region about what is required to comply with the transferring, lifting and repositioning procedures and to conduct a proper transfer.

RECOMMENDATION 8

That Santa Maria Senior Citizens Home ensure that its *Transfer Lifting and Repositioning* policy is approved by the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region and that Santa Maria staff understand the policy, its requirements, and how to conduct a proper lift.

Finding

There is no consensus among Santa Maria staff about whether and in what circumstances care aides may deviate from a resident's care plan.

RECOMMENDATION 9

That Santa Maria Senior Citizens Home clarify, for both its management and care staff, who has the authority to change or deviate from a resident's care plan.

Finding

Santa Maria did not record whether it fully informed Margaret or her family about the status of her bedsores, the significance of her weight loss, her nutrition and hydration, or whether it fully engaged Margaret or her family in implementing solutions to these problems. Santa Maria also failed to follow up with Margaret and her family about the potential significance of her fall and their request that the care aides involved in her fall no longer work with her.

RECOMMENDATION 10

That, in keeping with resident and family centred care, Santa Maria Senior Citizens Home ensure that:

- a) Processes are put in place to fully inform residents and their families of the resident's care needs and of Santa Maria's plans to meet these needs.
- b) These discussions are documented.

Finding

Neither the Region nor the Ministry has undertaken to ensure that the Ministry's standards are being met and applied consistently and equitably across the Region and the province. All three levels of Saskatchewan's long-term care system need to work collaboratively to establish clear performance expectations and hold one another accountable for meeting those expectations.

RECOMMENDATION 11

That the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region:

- a) Develop and implement policies and procedures to operationalize the standards of care in the *Program Guidelines for Special-care Homes*.
- b) Identify, track and report on specific and measurable outcomes that ensure the standards of care in the *Program Guidelines for Special-care Homes* are met consistently for each long-term care resident.
- c) Include these specific and measurable outcomes as performance requirements in its agreements with long-term care facilities.

RECOMMENDATION 12

That the Ministry of Health ensure that all health regions:

- a) Develop and implement policies and procedures to operationalize the standards of care in the *Program Guidelines for Special-care Homes*.
- b) Identify, track and report on specific and measurable outcomes that ensure the standards of care in the *Program Guidelines for Special-care Homes* are met consistently for each long-term care resident.
- c) Include these specific and measurable outcomes as performance requirements in their agreements with long-term care facilities.

RECOMMENDATION 13

That the Ministry of Health implement a publicly accessible reporting process that families can use to see whether each long-term care facility is meeting the *Program Guidelines for Special-care Homes*.

Finding

When Margaret was a resident at Santa Maria, its staff were not always aware of, and did not always consistently respond to, Margaret's preferences and her and her family's concerns.

RECOMMENDATION 14

That Santa Maria Senior Citizens Home implement an efficient process for ensuring that all staff caring for a resident are, and remain, aware of concerns and preferences raised by the resident and family members.

Finding

Santa Maria's new *Management of Resident/Family Concerns* policy addresses most of the requirements in the Ministry's Guidelines about concern-handling and appeals. However, it does not explain how residents and their families will be informed of appeal levels and procedures, and what resources (besides the Region's Client Representative) are available.

RECOMMENDATION 15

That Santa Maria Senior Citizens Home take steps to ensure that its *Management of Residents/Family Concerns* policy meets the requirements of standards 17.3 and 2.4 of the *Program Guidelines for Special-care Homes* and is widely available and communicated to staff, residents and their families.

Finding

Neither the Ministry's Guidelines nor Santa Maria's *Management of Resident/Family Concerns* policy address how Santa Maria is to handle concerns about resident care that are raised by its staff.

RECOMMENDATION 16

That Santa Maria Senior Citizens Home provide a comprehensive process to investigate and protect anyone, including staff, who, in good faith, raise questions or concerns about a resident's care.

Finding

The Ministry's Guidelines lack specific requirements to help ensure that the concern-handling and appeal processes at long-term care homes are fair and reasonable.

RECOMMENDATION 17

That the Ministry of Health amend the *Program Guidelines for Special-care Homes* to provide more details of the steps needed in concern-handling and appeal processes, and ensure that the processes are procedurally fair.

Finding

Santa Maria's strained employer-employee relationship and work environment could be affecting the quality of care it is providing to residents.

RECOMMENDATION 18

That Santa Maria Senior Citizens Home take steps to identify the issues straining its employer-employee relationship and implement an inclusive plan to address these issues.

Finding

Based on what we heard from long-term care staff, management and families, Saskatchewan's long-term care system appears to be under strain. It is not clear whether the system is structured to meet the needs of residents in long-term care now and in the future.

RECOMMENDATION 19

That the Ministry of Health, in consultation with the health regions and other stakeholders:

- a) **Identify the care needs of current and future long-term care residents.**
- b) **Identify the factors affecting the quality of long-term care delivery.**
- c) **Develop and implement a strategy to meet the needs of long-term care residents and to address the factors affecting the quality of long-term care in Saskatchewan; and make the strategy public.**