

Countryside

Buffalo Grove, IL
Published: Thursday
Circ: 5,542

OCT 11, 2007



Alden Long Grove Rehabilitation & Health Care Center is being sued by the family of a patient who died last year.
— Buzz Orr/Staff Photographer

Nursing home sued after patient's death

Law firm has record of suing chain's facilities

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Taking care of nursing home residents is a demanding job with no room for error.

The long-term care industry is not only heavily regulated by the state, it also sits in the cross hairs of law firms that specialize in taking nursing homes to court.

The Chicago law firm Levin and Perconti is one of those firms.

Levin and Perconti filed a lawsuit Aug. 28 against the Alden Long Grove Rehabilitation & Health Care Center, 2308 Old Hicks Road, Long Grove.

The suit, filed by the Levin and Perconti law firm on behalf

of Michail Aronov's estate, alleges that the care center violated the Nursing Home Care Act and its staff's actions led to the wrongful death of Aronov.

Attorney Steven Levin said Aronov died Nov. 17, 2006, at the age of 82 due to malnutrition and dehydration.

Before Aronov died, the Illinois Department of Public Health investigated an October 2006 complaint from his family about weight loss, and according to the department's report, there was one deficiency cited because no plan of care was taken for rapid weight loss; however, no state or federal penalties were issued. The facility was required to submit a plan of correction.

Levin said the Aronov family reported weight-loss concerns to the staff at Alden, and the family was assured that the care center was handling the situation correctly.

The Public Health Depart-

ment report says Aronov lost 23 pounds between early May and late July 2006.

"The Aronov family put their dad in the facility because they trusted the facility would meet his needs," Levin said. "Alden woefully failed in fundamental areas."

Levin said that his firm has investigated 40 complaints against Alden care centers all over the Chicago area. The law firm has collected more than \$4 million in settlements, though, most of the complaints never went to trial or reached a settlement.

Number of complaints

According to the Public Health Department, Alden Long Grove was investigated seven times in 2007 for complaints, more than any other care center in Long Grove, Buffalo Grove, Wheeling or Arlington Heights. The next high-

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est number of complaints was four.

There are 27 Alden Care facilities in the Chicago area. Facilities in Naperville and McHenry also had seven complaint investigations in 2007. Three Alden Care centers had eight or more investigations in the same time period. Five locations have had zero reported complaints so far this year.

Public health officials warned that the raw numbers of complaint investigations do not tell the whole story.

"Any complaint or incident that goes to the department must be investigated," said Kimberly Parker, spokeswoman for the state's Public Health Department. "It can be anything or from anybody."

"Sometimes we go in and find nothing, and sometimes things could have been done differently at a facility," said Parker, refusing to speculate on what a complaint number means. "It would be wonderful if there are no problems, but

circumstances do come up."

Parker then added that one complaint investigation could lead to a number of investigations.

"Our focus is the health and safety of residents," she said.

Not an easy job

"There are a lot of complaints that end up cleared, but only the fines and lawsuits make the news," said Penny Zimmerman Wills, public relations manager for the Illinois Health Care Association. "Nursing homes are highly regulated. We try to give great care, but errors are made."

Wills added that there is a picture that people never see.

"There are very ill people at these places that are very hard to care for," she said. "The people working in long-term care are so dedicated and patient. It's a very stressful environment, but (care providers) see it as their calling and are dedicated to it."

An Alden spokesperson said the center recently received the lawsuit and is reviewing it, but refused to comment further.