

Woman died as result of neglect, abuse, suit says

By Ann McGlynn | Friday, September 05, 2008

The family of a woman who lived at Forest Hill Health and Rehab Center in East Moline before she died last year is suing the center, claiming her death was the result of "nursing home abuse and neglect."

Olive Fletcher died in October at the age of 89. She went to live at Forest Hill in January 2006.

During her time there,

attorney Steve Levin said, Fletcher fell three times. Her last fall sent her to the hospital, where doctors said she was severely dehydrated. Fletcher had also lost a significant amount of weight, because of malnourishment, Levin said. She died of kidney failure as a result of the dehydration 11 days after the fall.

"Olive's death was a direct result of Forest Hill Health & Rehab Center's failure to provide the necessary care and treatment she deserved," Levin said in a news release announcing the lawsuit. "Her family was unaware of the numerous violations that GEM Management and its owner, Michael Lerner, have had in recent years."

The lawsuit was filed in Cook County, which is where Forest Hill's parent company, Gem Healthcare, is located. Lerner declined comment.

Fletcher lived with her daughter and son-in-law, Carol and Robert Magnuson, before going to Forest Hill. Dementia set in, and Fletcher began wandering the house at night.

"It got to the point where it was too much for us to handle; as much as it broke our hearts, we knew her safety was at risk in our home," Carol Magnuson said.

After Fletcher's death, the state investigated and found a violation in connection with her case. The center was not fined. Officials said, however, she was not properly hydrated.

The finding in Fletcher's case came a month after the center was fined \$13,000 by state and federal authorities for another problem: the inappropriate handling of sexual activity between residents. The federal government also declined to pay for the care of new patients admitted under Medicare or Medicaid for a period of eight days.

According to state documents, the center failed to identify the sexual behaviors of residents with cognitive impairments, document the behaviors, develop plans prior to the sexual activity, implement interventions and ensure that eight "confused" residents were provided with adequate supervision.

Additional deficiencies found during an annual survey in January and throughout this year have all been corrected, a spokesman for the Illinois Department of Public Health said. Forest Hill is now in compliance with state and federal regulators.

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