

# ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☒ nursing home checkup

By Stephanie Yamkovenko | Photographs by Casey Martin

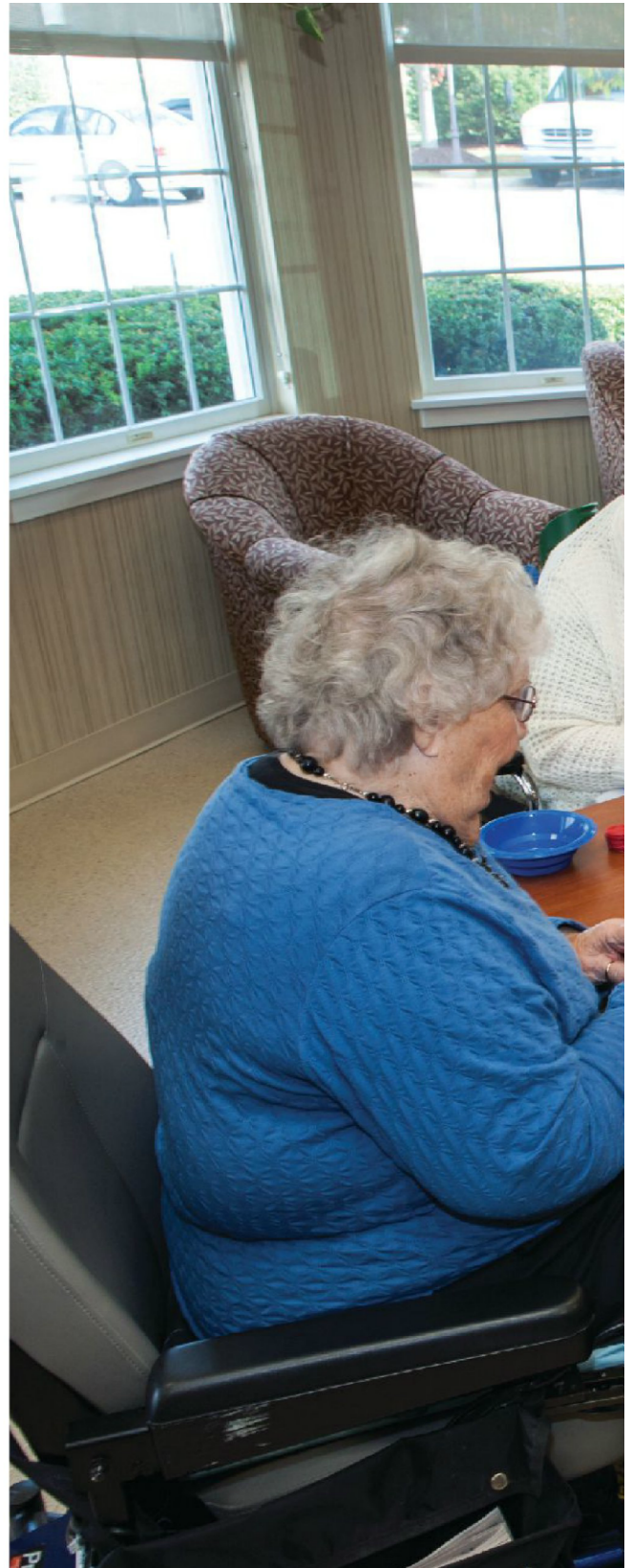
## Government inspection reports reveal and rate the quality of Frederick County's long-term care facilities

On a cool November afternoon last year, a nursing assistant found a woman unconscious in her room at The Vindobona Nursing Center in Braddock Heights. A nurse at the facility began performing CPR until the paramedics arrived and took over. There was only one problem — the woman and her family previously had notified the nursing home staff of their “do not resuscitate” request. The next day, the woman died in the hospital, surrounded by her family, who told the hospital staff, again, not to resuscitate their loved one.

At Frederick's Northampton Manor Health Care Center, a woman who'd told staff she did not want to be transferred to another facility found herself forcibly placed on a stretcher, loaded onto an ambulance and — despite her protests — taken to another health facility one evening in March.

Those are just two of the total 113 deficiencies noted in the inspection reports for the 11 nursing homes in Frederick County during the past two years. The federal government's Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) agency conducts annual inspections at every Medicare- and Medicaid-certified long-term nursing care facility with surveyors from the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's Office of Health Care Quality.

Nursing homes in Frederick received a wide range in the number of deficiencies cited — from two at Buckingham's Choice in Adamstown to 23 at The Vindobona Nursing Center. According to the CMS, the average number of deficiencies per nursing home in Maryland is 10.7, slightly above the 7.5 national average.







## Frederick Nursing Homes Report Card

Name of Facility	Five-Star Rating	City	Severity	Total Number of Deficiencies (Since Jan. 2011)
BUCKINGHAM'S CHOICE	★★★★★	Adamstown	B to F	2
CITIZENS NSG HOME OF FREDERICK	★★★★★	Frederick	B to E	12
COLLEGE VIEW CENTER	★★★	Frederick	D	12
COPPER RIDGE	★★★★★	Sykesville	B to E	13
GLADE VALLEY CENTER	★★★★★	Walkersville	C to E	8
GOLDEN LIVINGCENTER, FREDERICK	★★★★★	Frederick	C to E	12
HOMWOOD AT CRUMLAND FARMS	★★★★★	Frederick	D	2
LORIEN HEALTH SYSTEMS, MT. AIRY	★★★★★	Mt. Airy	C to E	12
NORTHAMPTON MANOR	★★	Frederick	D to G	8
ST. JOSEPH'S MINISTRIES	★★★★★	Emmitsburg	D to E	9
THE VINDOBONA NURSING CENTER	★★★	Braddock Heights	D to G	23

The surveyor assigns an alphabetical scope and severity value, "A" through "L," to the deficiency. "A" is the least serious and "L" is the most serious rating. <http://www.in.gov/isdh/reports/QAMIS/rptcrd/matrlink.htm>

113 Total for All Facilities

In the past, consumers who wanted to review inspection reports had to visit a nursing home in person and ask to see the document. "These reports are requested for review very rarely," says Keith White, administrator of The Vindobona's Nursing and Rehabilitation Services. But this year, CMS began publishing the full text of its inspection reports online to make the quality of care information more accessible.

### The Inspection Process

The Office of Health Care Quality hires registered nurses as surveyors to conduct the

inspections. Before the surveyors can work independently, they have to complete a yearlong training period with a preceptor who provides guidance and consultation.

"They also go to a weeklong program that is presented by CMS," explains Margie Heald, deputy director of federal programs for the Maryland Office of Health Care Quality. "They have to sit for a written exam and pass it to be certified. Once they are certified, then they can work independently."

She adds that the unannounced survey typically lasts a week and is conducted by four surveyors who put in 160 hours of site time.

"The state is acting as the federal surveying force, and they do an outstanding job in conducting those surveys," says Joe DeMattos, president of Health Facilities Association of Maryland, the organization that represents the 233 nursing homes in Maryland.

The four surveyors merge their findings in a document called a "Statement of Deficiency," which a supervisor at the office reviews to ensure there is evidence to support the survey team's findings, according to Heald. Any facility cited with a deficiency in its inspection report is required to submit a plan of correction in 10 days and come into compliance in 90 days.



## *From 'Minimal Harm' to 'Immediate Jeopardy'*

"If a deficiency is noted, it is promptly addressed," White says. "A Plan of Correction includes answering the following: what corrective action will be accomplished, how we will identify any other resident having the potential to be affected, what measures we will implement or what systemic changes we will make, and a specific date when corrective action will be completed."

Each deficiency is assigned a severity from "A" to "L" with an "A" representing a deficiency that has potential for no more than minimal harm and is an isolated incident and an "L" representing immediate jeopardy with a recurring pattern.

Two facilities in Frederick County had deficiencies with a severity of "G" in the past two years — Northampton Manor and The Vindobona — for the cases cited at the beginning of this article.

"If we cite a deficiency at an actual harm level, if it's 'G' or above, we have to do an onsite revisit to ensure that they have implemented their plan of correction," says Heald. "If, at that point, we find other deficiencies, then they will get denial of payment and possibly other sanctions."

After 90 days, a facility that has not submitted an acceptable plan of correction or is not in compliance can face sanctions, which include denial of payment from Medicare for new admissions and fines by the federal and state government.

Authorities maintain a close watch on facilities that continuously receive deficiencies and fail to come into compliance to continue providing unsafe care. "If there is a building that is struggling and not meeting the mark consistently over time, then they can be put on a federal watch list," DeMattos says. "For two years, they are surveyed at minimum every six months, but they can be surveyed at any time. That is called a special focus facility." Frederick County currently does not have any facilities that fall into that category.



(previous page) It's time for BINGO. Glade Valley Center's Recreation Director An-Lorraine Hertzog (back right) calls out numbers for a game involving BINGO players (from left to right) Betty Catania, Marjorie Darfler, Ethel Turner and Bob Sebastian. (above) The community dining room at The Vindobona Nursing Center conveys a homelike setting with comfortable furniture and wall artwork.

### *10 Questions to Ask When Choosing a Nursing Home*

- 1 What is the nursing home's expertise and does it fit the needs of my family member or loved one?
- 2 Visit the nursing home a couple of different days at different times of the day. How is care being delivered while you are on site?
- 3 How do the patients in the building look? Are staff members readily available to patients?
- 4 If visiting during dining times, what does the quality of food, the choices of food and the cleanliness of the area look like?
- 5 If the nursing home has a deficiency you want to address, ask about the nursing home's plan of correction for that deficiency. How was it remedied and was there any actual harm to a resident?
- 6 Ask to speak to representatives of the nursing home's resident council or the family council. What are their views and opinions of the nursing home?
- 7 Can you see the most current inspection report? (Note: This may not be posted online.)
- 8 What is the facility's customer service rating on the most recent Maryland Nursing Facility Family Survey?
- 9 Ask about the nursing home's disaster protocol. How does it handle recent weather events, such as the blizzard in 2010?
- 10 Meet the administrator of the nursing home. Has the director of nursing remained at the facility with some tenure?



## Addressing Complaints at Nursing Homes

In addition to the Maryland Office of Health Care Quality's annual inspection of nursing homes, the agency can conduct an evaluation at any time based on formal complaints filed by residents, their family or friends.

*"We get over 2,000 complaints and self-reports a year for nursing homes,"*

notes Margie Heald, deputy director of federal programs for the state agency. "Facilities are required to report to our office certain incidents that happen or allegations of abuse, neglect, misappropriation of resident property or injuries of unknown origin."

Another option for consumers is to contact Frederick County's Department of Aging. "I provide monitoring for residents," says Mia Brust, the department's ombudsman of long-term care. "There are approximately 1,800 residents in Frederick County that use the long-term care community. Last year, we opened approximately 20 cases, and all of them were able to be resolved."



(top) The physical and occupational therapy room at The Vindobona Nursing Center features a variety of equipment for rehabilitation purposes. (above) Madeline Burns and Kim Rieara whip up batter for a batch of whoopie pies during activity time at The Vindobona Nursing Center.

## *A Five-Star Rating System*

CMS developed the five-star rating system three years ago; this system rates facilities on a variety of factors including health inspection ratings, staffing ratings and quality measure ratings. The inspection reports are weighed the most heavily when determining the rating, according to Heald.

"The five-star system is a weighted system," DeMattos says. "Not everybody can be a five star in any specific geographic area. It is very useful for families that want to go and get in a specific geographic region and compare."

In Frederick County, four nursing homes received five stars (Buckingham's Choice, Glade Valley Center, Golden LivingCenter and Copper Ridge) and the lowest rating in the county is a two-star rating for Northampton Manor.

Some in the nursing home industry believe that the five-star system doesn't accurately measure today's nursing homes. "It's something to look at, but it's not the thing you want to totally hang your hat on," says Marsha Butler, vice president of sales and marketing for Genesis HealthCare, representing Glade Valley Center in Walkersville and College View Center in Frederick.

But DeMattos offers another view of the system. "Providers in skilled nursing and rehab centers reserved judgment and were skeptical initially when CMS announced the five-star system," he says. "Interestingly enough, I think going forward it has had a positive impact in terms of guiding the evolution of care and allowing centers to be more competitive."

## *What to Know When Selecting a Nursing Home*

Finding a nursing home that will meet the needs of your family member or loved one can be a difficult and stressful process.

"When you're placing someone in a nursing home, it can be really hard because sometimes people do promise that I will never do this to you, and it just happens," says Mia Brust, ombudsman of long-term care at Frederick County's Department of Aging. "You can no longer take care of a loved one. You've tried to delegate care. You've done everything."

Consumers can begin their research at the CMS Nursing Home Compare website to find the facility's star rating. Also, they can review the deficiencies in inspection reports for that facility using ProPublica's Nursing Home Inspection online search tool. Finally, consumers can visit the Maryland Health Care Commission's website and read its online Consumer Guide to Long Term Care to see customer satisfaction ratings. (See "Researching Nursing Homes," on page 24).

"I always ask that families use Nursing Home Compare," Brust says. "It is a great tool. But nothing can compare to actually going into a nursing home and using all of your senses and just getting a general feel for purchasing care."

Visiting a nursing home once might not be enough to get an accurate picture of the facility. "You really need to visit a couple of different times [at] each skilled nursing and rehab center and really realize different centers have different expertise relative to long-term care, post-acute care or transitional rehabilitative care," suggests DeMattos.

While on a tour of a nursing home, Butler advises paying attention to what is going on throughout the day. "How is care being delivered? How do the patients that are in the building look? Is the staff readily available to patients? If you go during dining time, look at the quality of the food. Look at the cleanliness of the building." She also suggests asking what the facility's rating was on the most recent Maryland Health Care Commission's annual customer satisfaction survey.

Brust advocates frankly inquiring about any deficiencies cited in inspection reports when interviewing an administrator or director of nursing. "It lets the admissions person know that they're an educated consumer," she says.

"A consumer could ask, 'What is your plan of correction to the deficiency? How did you remedy that? Was actual harm done to a resident?'"

Heald urges families to ask for the most current inspection report, which might not be immediately available on the CMS or ProPublica website due to a lag time in posting. "Facilities are required to publicly post the results of their surveys for the past year, so you should be able to walk into a facility and find a book or a bulletin board with the most recent deficiencies published there," she notes. "You can also contact our office and we can provide you with that information."

As the county's ombudsman of long-term care, Brust offers individual consultations, which is a free service for Frederick County residents. "I do consultations with families and prospective consumers for long-term care on how to choose a long-term care facility," she says. "I stay very neutral in my recommendations, but I give them factors to look at when they're prospective buyers of this service." She asks interested consumers to call 301-600-2877 to schedule an appointment.

## *A Changing Industry, a Demanding Generation*

With so much information about nursing homes now available from a variety of resources, consumers have the chance to make informed decisions about facilities before even going for a tour. "I think the public is much more aware of all the information that is out there," says Heald.

Butler agrees. "We are working with patients and families who are very educated. They've done their research, and when they show up at your door, they have high expectations. It's really more about choices — the demands of patients are very different. The baby boomers are wanting Internet access, wanting DVDs."

Those changes in patients' needs and expectations have caused the nursing home industry to adjust and adapt. "Long-term care isn't long anymore," Butler remarks.





(top) Betty Catania works on her computer in her room at Glade Valley Center in Walkersville. (above) Jeanette Eleff and Keith White, administrator of nursing and rehabilitation services, are shown on the campus of The Vindobona Nursing Center in Braddock Heights.

"If you were in this business 15 years ago, you wouldn't recognize it today. It's very patient-focused today, in terms of patients making choices from what time they go to rehab, to what time they will eat, to restaurant-style dining where people pick from a menu," she says.

Maintaining past decades of inspection reports and publishing information about the quality of nursing homes on the Internet are part of the efforts of keeping vulnerable patients safe. "It should be noted that the nursing home business is highly regulated, second only to nuclear power," White states.

The Vindobona Nursing Center recently received a deficiency citation for a staff member buttering residents' bread without gloves. The dietary employee had thoroughly washed her hands before, but the action was cited as unsanitary. "The resident may see the act of wearing gloves as being less home-like and impersonal," he states. Finding the middle ground between residents' preferences and safety and compliance with specific regulations is an ideal that can be difficult for a regulatory agency.

Even with the 113 deficiencies of Frederick County nursing homes in the past two years, customer satisfaction is higher than the state average.

"I think by and large skilled nursing and rehab centers in Maryland as a group stack up among the best in the country," says DeMattos.

With an increase in the number of patients being discharged back into their communities across the country, the ability to return home after care at a nursing home is more likely. "Nobody ever grows up and says, 'I want to live in a nursing home,'" observes Butler. "People say, 'You know, if I have to go there, I will go, but I don't want to stay.'"

Whether a person needs short-term or long-term care in Frederick County's nursing homes, when consumers find and analyze the information provided publicly about the quality and customer satisfaction at each nursing home, it can help them make informed decisions and ensure the safety of their loved ones. 🌙

## Researching Nursing Homes

"Consumers are very savvy in terms of looking up things on the Internet to try to make decisions," says Marsha Butler, vice president of sales and marketing for Genesis HealthCare, representing Glade Valley Center in Walkersville and College View Center in Frederick. "A lot of families go online to look up survey history."

To begin your search, visit these recommended websites:

The federal government's Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) publishes the inspection reports on the nursing home's profile page on its Nursing Home Compare website ([www.medicare.gov/NHcompare](http://www.medicare.gov/NHcompare)). Consumers can also find the nursing home's five-star rating here.

ProPublica, an independent nonprofit news organization, offers a search tool on its website that allows consumers to use keywords, location or nursing home name to find the texts of more than 29,000 nursing home inspection reports detailing over 144,000 deficiencies (<http://projects.propublica.org/nursing-homes>).












The Maryland Health Care Commission's Consumer Guide to Long Term Care provides customer satisfaction ratings for nursing homes in the state (<http://mhcc.maryland.gov/consumerinfo/longtermcare>).

## Measuring Customer Satisfaction in Maryland Nursing Homes

The Maryland Health Care Commission conducts a survey annually to measure the satisfaction and experience of family members of residents in Maryland's nursing homes. The 2012 family survey found that 90 percent of family members or responsible parties would recommend their nursing home. In addition to a statewide satisfaction rating, each facility receives an individual rating.

The average satisfaction rating of the 11 nursing homes in Frederick County is 96 percent, and five nursing homes had a 100 percent rating, including The Vindobona Nursing Center.

Below are the customer satisfaction ratings from the commission's survey. The percentage listed by the facility name is the percent of people surveyed from that facility who responded with "Definitely yes" and "Probably yes" to the question, "Would you recommend the nursing home?"

100%		BUCKINGHAM'S CHOICE
98%		CITIZENS NSG HOME OF FREDERICK
88%		COLLEGE VIEW CENTER
100%		COPPER RIDGE
100%		GLADE VALLEY CENTER
91%		GOLDEN LIVINGCENTER, FREDERICK
99%		HOMWOOD AT CRUMLAND FARMS
97%		LORIEN HEALTH SYSTEMS, MT. AIRY
83%		NORTHAMPTON MANOR
100%		ST. JOSEPH'S MINISTRIES
100%		THE VINDOBONA NURSING CENTER

# Nursing Home Facts and Figures

1,800

- ★ Approximately **residents** in Frederick County use the long-term care community. There are 11 nursing homes and 19 assisted living facilities in the county.

- ★ Frederick Ombudsman program (within the Frederick Department of Aging): Last year, the program opened approximately 20 cases and all of them were **able to be resolved**. The program provided more than 300 consultations for families and consumers of long-term care communities and provided consultation to providers (approximately more than 100 calls to providers).

12

- ★ The Maryland Office of Health Care Quality conducts surveys approximately every **months** in each nursing home. The health survey is conducted by registered nurses, and generally **four nurses** perform an annual survey. The surveys usually last a week, approximately 160 hours of on-site time. There is a three-month window in which that survey can take place, and the survey time is unannounced.

- ★ The surveyors at the Maryland Office of Health Care Quality can survey at any time based on complaints. They can go back to any skilled nursing and rehab center at any time for an evaluation **based on a complaint**.

- ★ When there's a deficiency in the inspection report, the facilities are required to submit a plan of correction within 10 days of receiving the report from the Office of Health Care Quality. And they have 90 days to come into compliance with the survey findings.

2,000

- ★ Maryland Office of Health Care Quality receives more than **complaints** and self-reports each year for nursing homes in Maryland. (A self-report occurs when a facility reports certain incidents that happen or allegations of abuse, neglect, misappropriation of resident property or injuries of unknown origin. It is **mandatory** for facilities to report these incidents.)

- ★ The office maintains **32** surveyors for **233** nursing homes operating in Maryland.