

NHWSB and Oak Hills

Date: May 15, 2024

To: Members of the Nursing Home Workforce Standards Board and members of the general public

From: Linnea Becerra, OAS, Nursing Home Workforce Standards Board

RE: Tour of Oak Hills Living Center results in question and answer session

Chair Jamie Gulley, board member Mary Swanson, Executive Director Leah Solo and Linnea Becerra arrived for a scheduled tour of the Oak Hills Living Center at 2 p.m., May 15, 2024. Candas met the group at the front of the building and led it through the facility to a conference room that was set up with tables in a “U” formation and four open seats at the front of the room. The room was filled with staff members (ranging from administrators to RNs), Oak Hills board members and one resident. Two RNs had their children with them for the duration of the session.

Context

Oak Hills Living Center is a stand-alone, not-for-profit, community-owned skilled nursing facility that is run by a board of directors. The facility has 94 occupied beds, 10 open beds they aren’t filling due to staffing issues and more than 200 people on a waiting list. The long-term care portion is completely full, while they hold 10 beds open in the rehabilitation section because there aren’t enough staff members to care for a full facility. Oak Hills Living Center has approximately eight full-time LPN or RN openings and 15 CNA openings it cannot fill, due to lack of applicants. It currently uses four to five pool nurses to cover its needs.

Feedback

The director of nursing shared she is forced to hire more pool and temporary staff members, which she can’t let go of because there are no applicants, and she feels the wages they can offer are not competitive with other RN settings, such as acute care or hospital work. She shared it is a “nightmare and will only get worse if there aren’t major improvements.” Staff members shared burnout is a huge problem in the skilled nursing field. One common statement was they want competitive wages, but the state needs to increase funding and decrease the lag time. There was much discussion about the medically complex nature of nursing homes now as opposed to 10 years ago. Staff members shared that their wages have barely increased during the past two decades and that people who have been at the facility for decades barely make more than the new proposed minimum wages. In general, the staff members feel unheard by the Legislature and the governor.

There was a strong reaction shared with the group about the federal mandates for having 24/7 RN coverage on site.

Suggestions

There were many suggestions for the board and to improve the industry. The ideas are listed below.

- Increase state funding to nursing homes
- Provide funding for the minimum wage upfront
- Innovate with technology
- Address the pool staffing issue – have incentives to leave the pool and stay with an employer
- Provide support for staff members' mental health and burnout, possibly a resource line
- Promote growth within the facility
- Grants and scholarships for people to continue education toward higher skilled positions
- Decrease Department of Human Services and Minnesota Department of Health regulations
- Recruit staff members from overseas
- Make training and courses more accessible for rural employees – have them on site
- Increase minimum wage for the RN group
- Have a long-term or holistic plan for taking care of everyone, especially those who are aging and need complex support