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Jonathan Zettel/Metroland

Brucelea Haven is a 144-bed long-term care facility in Walkerton, operated by the County of Bruce.

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'IT'S BEEN GOING ON FOR YEARS'

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WALKERTON, ONT. - Family members and staff have come forward to tell their stories following an article outlining multiple reports of noncompliance at Walkerton's Brucelea Haven.

The family members report incidents of being discouraged to call an ambulance during an outbreak, two cases of alleged sexual abuse and concerns raised by family

members shut out of care because they did not have power of attorney.

Multiple sources said the challenges facing Brucelea Haven have been going on for years.

As part of the investigation for this article, the County of Bruce was given the opportunity to respond to the stories brought to light by the families.

"While I would be pleased to facilitate a meeting between Brucelea Haven administration and individuals who have identified these

significant matters, I am unable to respond publicly to any issues pertaining to a resident's care and or activities, while in our facilities," Bruce County director of health services Michael McKeage said in an email response. "This is a legislated restriction which directs such topics to be held in confidence between the resident, members of their care team and the individual (s) chosen by the resident to be their power of attorney."

McKeage goes on to say inci-

dents within the home that were handled properly by the administration would not end up in a Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care report.

In order to protect residents, some of whom still live at Brucelea Haven, and to protect staff members, some of whom still work at the home, these sources will remain confidential.

Call an ambulance

During a respiratory outbreak in the summer of 2017, a family member said his mother took sick and was burning up. He asked staff to call an ambulance to take her to

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WHISTLEBLOWERS TOLD TO STOP

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the hospital.

He said a woman who was in charge that day was going to have him removed.

Eventually the resident was taken to hospital. She had pneumonia and her kidneys were shutting down.

"They were going to leave her in the bed to die," he said, adding hospital staff gave her fluids and she made a full recovery.

Following the incident, the man said Brucelea Haven administrator Willy Van Klooster reprimanded him for "getting loud with nurses."

"I don't give a darn," the man said. "This is nonsense."

Alleged sexual assault

Two family members came forward with unrelated allegations of sexual assault from a resident to another resident.

The first case happened in July of 2018 and according to the family member went to court but was thrown out because the victim, who had suffered a stroke, could not speak for herself.

"All of the things my mother has endured since having a stroke, I never thought I would have to disclose a sexual assault," she said.

According to the woman, the suspect was moved to a different floor and agreed to enter into a peace bond.

This same source said she was called by Brucelea Haven administrator Willy Van Klooster the morning after questions regarding her mother's case were sent to the county as part of the investigation for this article.

"I received a rather frantic phone call this morning from Willy, the administrator, which caught me quite off guard," the source wrote in an email. "He was making inquiries as to seemingly try to piece together events that have happened this week."

The source said Van Klooster asked her if she was going to call the Ministry of Health and Long-

Term Care, the Walkerton Herald-Times and Mayor Chris Peabody, who has been in touch with several families connected to Brucelea Haven as part of his investigation.

"(Van Klooster) seemed like this was urgent and remarked that a second article was about to be published with regards to all of this and that it is incorrect and will make false information about the nursing home," she said.

In an unrelated case from the summer of 2010, a family member said her mother was the victim of an alleged sexual assault from another resident. In this case, the victim of the alleged assault was moved to the secure ward.

"After a lot of soul searching and crying, my brother and I agreed, sadly, to move her," she said. "To keep her safe."

When asked about the specific case, McKeage said he could not comment. When asked about the policy of moving someone to a secure ward, he said the special care unit, located inside Brucelea Haven, is for residents who require special care for behavioural issues or are prone to wandering.

"Admissions to this unit are based on clinical criteria as managed by the LTHC physician in consultation with the resident's care team," he said.

There were no MOHLTC public reports relating to either of these two incidents.

"The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's reporting requirements do require concerns, such as those you have presented, to be reported to them and the resident's power of attorney immediately upon discovery," McKeage said. "Subsequent to the reporting of such events the ministry requires a critical incident investigation to be completed and the results filed with the ministry for their review. These reports and investigations are later followed-up by ministry visits to the home for further exam-

ination. If, at the conclusion of this examination, the home is found to be in compliance with all legislation, the incident will not be included in the ministry's public report."

Power of attorney

Two sources reached out to the Walkerton Herald-Times outlining concerns of being shut out from care of a resident at Brucelea Haven because they did not have power of attorney.

In one case a source said a family member had fallen out of bed and had to go to hospital with a head injury. The resident was released back to Brucelea Haven within a few hours and the source told staff they would be willing to spend the night at the home to make sure the resident was OK.

"They assured me they would care for her and they would call me," the source said, adding she left the home.

Later staff found the resident on the floor in the bathroom. She had broken her hip, the source said.

In this case, the source said she argued with the power of attorney, who lived out of country, and was then removed from the contact list.

"So, I then got a job there," the source said, in order to watch over the family member.

In an unrelated case from January 2014, three family members said they were shut out of care for a relative because they did not have power of attorney.

The family members said a restraining order was placed on them to prevent them from entering the home. Prior to the resident entering the Brucelea Haven, the shutout family members were the primary care givers in their home.

According to the three family members, the resident had pulled out a feeding tube and it was decided by other family members and a doctor, they would no longer give the resident food or water. They said it was expected the resident would last four days, but

THE ISSUE: THE MOHLTC REPORTED MULTIPLE NON-COMPLIANCE ISSUES AT BRUCELEA HAVEN LOCAL IMPACT: FAMILIES AND STAFF HAVE COME FORWARD WITH THEIR STORIES

ended up living for 11 days.

During this period, the three family members were allowed to come into the home to say their goodbyes.

"I could hardly stand it," one source said.

McKeage said he could not comment on specific cases.

"The designation of a resident's power of attorney (POA) reflects the resident's choice of individual(s) who they wish to represent them, and/or be privy to their care plans in the event they become incapable to discussing such matters," McKeage said. "Individuals who wish to access resident information, who are not designated as a POA, should seek legal counsel to discuss these matters."

Whistleblowers told to stop

A source who worked at Brucelea Haven said she had called the Ministry of Health on three separate occasions and was aware of co-workers and family members who had done the same.

She said at one point an email was sent from Brucelea Haven administration telling staff to stop calling the ministry and added that after an incident of an intruder in the home, an email was sent to staff cautioning disciplinary actions should anyone speak of the incident.

During the investigation for this article, McKeage was asked if the administration ever told staff to stay silent on incidents. He did not provide a response addressing this particular question.

Two other sources who worked at Brucelea Haven also admitted to calling the MOHLTC.

"There's a lot of great and dedicated staff that work there," a source said. "It's not like nobody cares."

Another director of care

The County of Bruce has approved the hiring of a second director of care at Brucelea Haven.

"I am pleased to report that a second director of care position has been approved," said McKeage. "This position will provide additional resources which will allow greater support to staff, provide increased supervision and co-ordinate resident care."

According to the most recent Sunshine List, current director of care Lucy Elliott was paid more than \$110,000 in 2017.

A staff member who has worked at Brucelea Haven for more than 10 years, questioned this decision.

"Lucy is the problem," they said. "Any staff will tell you the same, plus a lot of families - and now the county is hiring another director of care? More money spent on management instead of front-line workers?"

Another staff member said the current director of care made changes when she came on that were unpopular with staff. A program that allowed staff to purchase meals was cancelled and the way shifts were scheduled was also changed.

"I know ladies who've worked there for 15 to 20 years, who left," the source said. "The few things they did to make us feel appreciated, were gone."

The source said she knew of multiple times staff had difficulties getting time off.

"We're working with residents so they have a better quality of life, but then our quality of life doesn't matter," they said. "We're a number; we're replaceable - that's what we're told - well then, if we are, go ahead."

STORY BEHIND THE STORY:

The Walkerton Herald-Times received multiple contacts of families and staff concerned about non-compliance issues at Brucelea Haven following an article published earlier this month.

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