

Nursing the wounds

Elderly citizens not given respect rightfully deserved

Imagine being strapped to a bed and administered necessary medication or lying in a bed with filthy sheets which stain a body plagued with sores. Now imagine that the only person who was someone who was verbally and physically abusive.

This is the harsh reality faced by many of our nation's elderly who seek the care of nursing centers.

The plight of aged Americans is the least mentioned topic in society. Elderly people across the United States are carted off to nursing homes where they often are humiliated, abused and abandoned. Counted, many nursing homes are legitimate care centers which provide valuable services to elderly Americans and their families. But according to recent government data, instances of abuse may be getting worse. These violations provide a pleasant insight into attitudes toward age and illness in



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America today. A USA Today report said there are approximately 15,000 nursing homes nationwide with about 1.3 million people seeking care.

This kind of care does not come cheap. Individuals, families and government programs filter huge amounts of money to nursing centers to ensure quality care. According to the Texas Department of Human Services, the state of Texas alone made \$1,279,620,856 in payments last year to long-term care facilities.

One can only wonder where all this money goes. The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services currently lists seven different types of violations common to nursing centers.

These violations range from misuse of restraints and neglect to stealing private property to physical abuse. Federal reports indicate that over one-quarter of the nation's nursing homes do not meet hygiene requirements. Others have patients

ridden with bedsores. Still others attend to patients personal care needs without any privacy; not so much as even a curtain around their beds.

Linda Finch, a Texas woman who recently made headlines retracing Amelia Earhart's historic flight, also is making headlines in a less than pleasant light. While Finch was jetting around the globe, charges stood against her for numerous violations that investigators discovered three years ago in two nursing homes she owns.

At her trial this September, Finch could face \$500,000 to \$50 million in fines.

State regulators asked the attorney general to sue Finch when Cruz Santa Ana, Sr., a resident at Pecan Grove Nursing Home in Austin, died. Staff members apparently failed to administer proper treatment for Cruz's diabetes and urinary tract infection.

Inspectors in May 1994 found so many problems at Finch's Dublin Nursing Center in Stephenville that a trustee was forced to take over.

Finch is quoted as saying the inspection report is "greatly exaggerated." Finch said she refuses to pay the fines since the problems were "not life-threatening."

Though Finch's remarks may seem callous and uncaring, they reflect attitudes which pervade society today.

Americans have a strange distaste for illness and growing old. Millions of dollars are spent each year on plastic surgery, fitness programs and beauty regimes as Americans eternally search for their "fountain of youth."

Senior citizens and those who suffer from illness, however, are pushed into care facilities and hospitals, so others are not "offended" by having to see them.

Other cultures revere elders, but Americans rely on the idea of "out of sight, out of mind." It seems as long as death and illness are not visible, they are not real possibilities. While citizens of countries such as Japan bow to elders, Americans lives more like James Dean: "Live fast, die young, leave a good-looking corpse."

End to homeless lifestyle requires society's support



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\$350. Social Security, Medicare and other senior-oriented programs, however, provide a safety net for many individuals. But there are people who are not homeless, but living in poverty and often homebound without proper heating, water or other amenities.

The opportunities for students on tight budgets to help the homeless and less fortunate are everywhere. Without any money at all, one can refer a homeless person to a shelter. Students with money to give, but wary as to where the money will go, have other options. Giving someone a fast-food gift certificate is just one possibility to consider.

Donations are another option to consider. Recyclables are collected by shelters with the proceeds used to help the homeless. Perhaps all Aggies can take stock of their wardrobes and give the pieces no longer in use to the homeless.

Volunteering also is a great way to help. Habitat for Humanity is an organization attempting to get at the root of the homeless problem by providing affordable housing to low-income families.

Families are provided a home in exchange for "sweat equity" and approximately \$30,000. The money comes in the form of a loan which is repaid at a low rate, typically \$150 per month. "Sweat equity" is the term used to denote the time and effort put into the construction of a home by the recipient family. Volunteers and the family construct the house together, building community ties that reach across income barriers. More immediate help is offered by shelters and soup kitchens to serve the day-to-day needs of the homeless.

Help is always appreciated at these organizations, especially in the summer months when many regular volunteers are on vacation or at home taking care of children out of school. Now is a prime time to make a difference.

Homeless people are like everyone else. They deserve to be treated with dignity and compassion in their effort to live a good life. A little effort on the part of people more fortunate can make a huge difference in their quality of life.

According to the General Accounting Office of the United States Congress, the number who are homeless for at least one night during the year is probably over three million. Homelessness is a problem which requires the attention of everyone.

The United States Conference of Mayors reported that one out of four homeless is employed full- or part-time. At the time of the report in 1992, a person working 40 hours a week at minimum wage grossed about \$700 per month and took home less than \$600. Getting a job will not help many of the homeless when they must save up enough for a year-lease rent, not to mention a deposit. Homeless families are in a much more desperate position.

The Mayor's report also estimated that one-quarter of the homeless are veterans — most of them from the Vietnam conflict. Many veterans of that war were abandoned and discouraged, even dishonored. In many cases, they ended up living on the streets; some of them were disabled, others mentally traumatized by war experiences and more were unable to find work. These people need and deserve help.

One out of four homeless people is a child. The fastest growing group of homeless is families with children. Their number nearly doubled between 1984 and 1989, and the numbers continue to increase. Surely there are people willing to help homeless children. The sad fact is many homeless children grow up to be homeless adults. If given a chance, most of the homeless would choose to get off the streets.

Elderly people on fixed incomes do not fit the traditional image of the homeless, but a senior citizen who receives \$450 a month in benefits can not survive in any city where rent is



Linda Finch, airplane pilot, stands accused of violating health codes regarding nursing home facilities under her ownership.

Campus Voice



PHOTOGRAPH: Tim Moog

Concerning the homelessness problem America faces today.

Locally, I don't see too much being done about the homeless people ... we don't think about them as much during the summer; they get forgotten.

Kalatu Davies
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Wednesday's Campus Voice: Columnists and their actions.



MAIL CALL

Student Rec Center policy causes upset

Dennis Corrington's decision to end the issuing of Rec Center passes is appalling. It appears that local gym managers were allowed to sway Corrington's mind regarding this issue of student affairs, but the students themselves had no such success.

Fall and spring students were willing to pay good money (\$70) for use of the Rec Center during the summer. Now, even though the Rec Center will lose a lot of much-needed income, local businessmen apparently know the right people and they will continue to get their way unless something is done.

The argument used by the gym managers is nonsensical. Contrary to the false statement of these managers, fall and spring students do get to use the Evans Library during the summer. We can also use the MSC and the University computer system, even though we only pay fees for access to these facilities during the fall and spring semesters. We are still Aggies.

We do not stop being Aggies the minute we turn in our last final exam in the spring. I'm not going to use any of the local facilities this summer. I hope others will join me.

Keith Volanto
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Rec Center policy slights students

Once an Aggie always an Aggie — not any more, according to an internal policy memorandum enacted by the Texas A&M administration.

According to the policy, when students are not currently enrolled in classes they are no longer students of A&M. This means students who take fall and spring classes, but do not take summer classes, are not allowed to use any of the perks available while attending A&M.

The shame of the matter is that the students of A&M (whether currently enrolled or not) are not protected by this policy. By stating currently non-enrolled students are not considered students any longer, A&M once again gets vague and nondescript in its policy making. With these rules, students who choose to take the summer off should have to reapply for fall admission — after all, they are no longer students according to A&M's policy.

Whether current students or not, anyone may use the services at the A.P. Beutel Health Center, Evans Library, the Memorial Student Center, and the University computer system. All of these services include mandatory fees instituted upon students of A&M by the administration but all are treated differently by the administration than the Student Rec Center.

A few years ago, A&M decided opening the Rec Center and allowing non-students to join caused an unfair advantage for A&M, thereby putting the University in direct competition with lo-

cal fitness organizations. The policy allows for a fee of \$25 per summer session to be assessed for students who are enrolled; students not enrolled could pay \$70 for the summer. The \$25 fee for enrolled students is still in effect, but the discrepancy falls in the area of non-enrolled students.

These students can no longer purchase a \$70 pass for the summer sessions.

But A&M always has had a spoken good-neighbor policy in which it has tried to quietly co-exist with the private business owners in the area, many of which are alumni.

At the inception of the Rec Center, A&M decided that the fee for the using the Rec Center must be a mandatory fee for all students in order to raise enough money to run the facility and make the payments for it. By forcing every student to pay, the administration has a guaranteed number of dollars to spend paying for the Rec Center each year.

The bottom line is A&M made a decision some time ago. It voiced this decision and allowed it to be known to the community. Now the University has an ethical obligation to stick by this agreement.

What A&M needs is a little consistency. The administration has always maintained that students need an

arena to be physically active.

Hence, they agreed with the statute mandating a minimum of four hours of kinesiology credit to be earned before graduating. However, it appears physical activity is only important if students are paying the administration for use of buildings in which they are active.

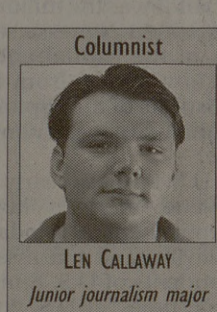
This whole controversy is about money and nothing else — this is a race for the student buck.

However, some sort of middle ground should be found in order to resolve this issue. When the original Rec Center financing agreements were being made, the deal should have been structured to allow students a choice. Students have choices when it comes to meal

plans and sports passes, but not the Rec Center. One might wonder if the renovation of Kyle Field and the construction of Reed Arena will bring mandatory sports facility fees in the year to come. The Rec Center should have been an option to the students, but the University could not secure adequate funding to build the building without guaranteeing the payment schedule.

It seems the administration will not honor a deal it made with students because it made a different deal with two local business owners, both alumni.

For students, it might feel awkward to be caught in the middle of this situation, but the administration always says students are A&M's greatest resources.



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