

From:

Holly Ann Lewis



To: SLO County Health Commission

To whom it may concern,

My name is Holly Lewis. I am writing today to ask for your help. I am asking for you to allow **“1 Essential Family Caregiver/visitor”** into our nursing facilities, that meet our state guideline criteria for nursing home visitation. It has been almost 5 months since we have been allowed to give essential family support to our loved ones in nursing facilities. I am writing today to speak for my Mother, some of our family members, and myself. We want to do this safely, and I believe that if we are screened just as the staff are screened, we could be of great help and support to our loved ones, and maybe even save their life.

Before COVID, my Father and I were at my Moms facility 5 days a week or more, for several hours per visit. We are more than visitors, we are essential family caregivers, who worked hands-on with her. We helped my Mom recover from adverse reactions to medications, that were prescribed to help her Dementia symptoms. Last year my Mom had stopped talking and using her hands because of these medications. For the last 2 years we have had to advocate for her rights for “basic care” and her “quality of life”, at her facility.

With help from her neurologist, she was tapered off these medications last June, and we found that after being off the medications, she started to recover. Before COVID, she was making progress with eating and drinking independently. Her Dementia was not as bad as everyone thought. The doctors were amazed at her recovery. When COVID came, we got her a phone so we could Facetime, and we also do two “window visits” each week. We have not missed a window visit for 19 weeks. We had to watch her go through many phases of decline, and many times, my Mom didn’t want to live. I had to spend hours on the phone, just to convince her, it won’t be this way forever. Now it’s been almost 5 months! She’s declining.

Last week on Aug 2, 2020, my Mom was admitted to one of our local hospitals. If I had not paid attention to her recent decline at our window visits, and Facetime calls, we would not have discovered that she was indeed having internal bleeding. If it had gone undetected, it would have almost certainly proved fatal. When she was admitted to the hospital, I was finally able to be by her side and give the care she so desperately needed. I was happy that the hospital allowed “1 essential family visitor”. If I would have not been allowed inside, the hospital would have administered the wrong medication to her, for the second time in the past year. I had discovered that they had not updated my Moms current medication list for this most recent visit, nor her last one in May 2019. Big problem there!

I had to stop her nurse from administering her a medication that we discontinued a year ago, because of adverse effects. She was already dangerously close to having a blood transfusion, and now the hospital was going to make a medication error, for the second time.

What if I had not been there to stop that from happening? What if I hadn't discovered that the hospital had not updated her medication list? My Mom was in no condition to advocate for herself.

What if I didn't Facetime and window visit each week? Would her facility have noticed her decline? I had been concerned for several weeks and communicated.

How are we protecting our most vulnerable when their symptoms are going unnoticed from their facilities?

How are we protecting our most vulnerable when they are declining cognitively and physically, and we have no way of knowing if they can recover from this decline? What if this is causing permanent damage?

Our loved ones are declining before our very eyes! After spending 3 days with my Mom at the hospital, it's sad to say that her Dementia and physical health have declined significantly since we have not been able to help with her daily care, or contribute to her a quality life.

How can anyone say we are not essential?

I want to know why family visitation is allowed in our county hospitals, assisted living, but not nursing facilities? Family is going to be extra careful to not expose themselves because it's our Mother's and Fathers in there. Our loved ones are isolated and confused.

I want to know, under what conditions do the nursing facilities need to be in, for our loved ones to be allowed inside visitors again? When are we allowed back in? Why aren't they getting outside visits?

If we are going to have to live with COVID for an extended period, it's imperative that we find a solution that supports their quality of life, and protects the health of people living in nursing facilities. I would wear all the PPE, limit exposure, take a rapid test, do whatever it takes to help her. Please allow "1 essential family visitor/caregiver". I have many ideas of how we can support this safely. I would love to discuss this further, we must do something.

Thank you,

Holly Ann Lewis