

Family MATTERS

A newsletter of the Chicago Family Council Project
Illinois Citizens for Better Care – Spring 2006

Illinois Citizens for Better Care Launches New Family Council Project

In February, Illinois Citizens for Better Care (ICBC) launched a year-long project to teach family members of nursing home residents how to organize a family council and to advocate effectively for improved staffing and quality. The focus of the project is to instruct family members about their collective power as consumers, and to train them to use the family council model to exercise organizing and negotiating skills to work as agents for change.

ICBC plans to work in partnership with the Chicago long-term care ombudsman program to promote family councils. ICBC will also work with interested members of the IL Council for Long-Term Care and Life Service Network to arrange meetings with family members to develop family councils.

This project is modeled on a similar project implemented in Maryland by the National Citizens' Coalition for Nursing Home Reform from 2000-2005. Family members throughout the state were trained to create sustainable family councils. In 1999, 42.5% of Maryland nursing homes had family councils as opposed to 68.2% in 2003.

ICBC, founded in 1978, has a long history of advocacy for nursing home residents in Illinois. Each year, they help hundreds of families choose a nursing home, shorten nursing home stays, find alternatives to nursing home care, improve poor or abusive care, and cope with Medicaid and Medicare.

For more information about our work, visit www.nursinghomeaction.org or contact Alicia Loucks, Coordinator of Family Council Programming, email: aliciaicbc@core.com, tel. (312)730-8370.

Family Councils Flowering Across Illinois

The formation of family councils in Illinois is not new! Many family members of IL nursing home residents have been working over the years as part of family councils with the support of the IL Department on Aging.

For example, Tami Lynn Wacker of the long-term care ombudsman program in Bloomington is an enthusiastic supporter of family councils. One family council she has worked with organized a corps of volunteers who sign up for shifts to help answer call lights. Members call a CNA when needed, but have found that many requests are ones they can respond to (glass of water, sweater, etc.) These family members are actively enabling CNAs to give better care by providing them with more time to complete the parts of their work for which they have received training. This ultimately results in better care for all residents.

ICBC hopes to learn from and build on these and other IL family council accomplishments as they work to form and strengthen family councils in Chicago. If you have a family council success story you would like to share, please contact Alicia at aliciaicbc@core.com, tel. (312)730-8370.

Websites of Interest

Ontario Family Councils Program:

<http://www.familycouncils.net/>

Nursing Home Compare:

<http://www.medicare.gov/NHCompare/home.asp>

Member of the Family:

<http://memberofthefamily.net>

The Chicago Family Council Project is a project of Illinois Citizens for Better Care and the National Citizens' Coalition for Nursing Home Reform. For more information, contact ICBC at 220 South State Street, Suite 1928, Chicago, IL, 60604, tel. 312-663-5120.

Communicate with Other Illinois Family Councils

In order to facilitate the sharing of information between family councils throughout Illinois, ICBC has started a listserv for family members who are part of family councils or who are interested in starting one. The listserv is an email forum to discuss family council best practices throughout Illinois. Members are encouraged to post activities, pose questions, and share their related experiences. To sign up or learn more about the listserv, visit <http://groups.google.com/group/Illinois-Family-Councils>, or contact Alicia at aliciaicbc@core.com.

ICBC Speaks Up for Residents in the General Assembly

Illinois Citizens for Better Care's hard work in educating legislators about the importance of Senate Bill 2326 to nursing home residents has paid off. The bill has now passed both houses of the Illinois legislature.

Once the Governor signs SB 2326, the Abuse Prevention Review Team Act will finally be implemented. Although the Abuse Prevention Act became law in 2003, the Department of Public Health refused to implement it because it said there was no funding to do so. SB 2326 authorizes the Department to use nursing home fines to pay for implementation.

The Abuse Prevention Review Team Act is intended to attack the root causes of abuse and neglect of nursing home residents. The Act creates teams of independent experts to examine the records of every sexual assault of a nursing home resident, and every death related to a violation or a complaint. The teams do not do their own investigations, but they have access to a wide range of government and agency records. They are charged with making recommendations to the Department of Public Health or other state and private entities about how to prevent the terrible events they are reviewing. Public Health is not required to follow their recommendations, but it is required to respond in writing, and to explain any refusal to follow a recommendation. We believe the review teams will be an important weapon against the persistent and disturbing presence of abuse in nursing homes.

For more information, contact Wendy Meltzer at ICBC, tel. (312)663-5120.

Family Council Tips and Tools Topic #1 - RECRUITMENT

RECRUIT constantly by introducing yourself to others you see when you are visiting. Explain the purpose of the family council and invite them to attend the next meeting.

DEVELOP a flier or brochure to include in materials given to families during the resident's admission process.

GREET visitors to the facility by asking council members to volunteer to be "on duty" in the lobby once a month to share information about the family council.

ASK each council member to commit to bringing one additional person to the next meeting.

WORK with the facility to set up a "buddy system" - when new residents are admitted, the facility can see if the resident's family member would be interested in being in touch with another family member on the resident's unit. If so, the facility can give the new family member's phone number (with permission) to the family council representative for that unit who can call and introduce themselves and offer their support as the new family member adjusts. They can also let them know about the family council and invite them to attend the meetings.

OFFER a variety of opportunities for family involvement in improvement of quality in residents' lives.

MAINTAIN the interest of those who do attend meetings by 1) running efficient meetings, 2) making sure that the council has a mission and goals that are agreed upon by members, 3) making sure that the activities of the council reflect interests and concerns of family members.

RECOGNIZE council achievements and members' contributions in formal way.

INCLUDE time for socializing as a part of each meeting.