

In Support of SB 303

KRISTI SCHMITT

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Senate District #33

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Dear Honorable Senators,

I am writing in support of SB 303 and would like to share my experience as a medical provider and describe the situation I found myself in with my elderly father. Our family made the decision after a hospitalization that our father needed to be in physical therapy in a skilled care facility. Dad had lived in the nursing home for 4 months and on March 29th I was told I could not go in to see him. I asked the nursing staff if I could visit my Dad outside, 10 feet apart with both of us wearing a mask? They said the county medical director advised “absolutely not”, as there could be “no contact”. This is a county owned facility and my dad had been one of the County Commissioners to dig a shovel of dirt for the construction.

I am a Certified Family Nurse Practitioner and my Dads POA. This made no scientific sense to me. When I questioned it, the administrator at the facility asked me if I had read the Medicare/Medicaid guidelines. I said I had-approximately all 34 pages. I saw nothing in there that would be breaking a law to go inside to be with my father. Dad had to walk into his bathroom, open the window and try to talk to me. It was too cold most days, and he just could not tolerate it. I noticed his feet were swelling, he was in his room for all meals, and he was barely able to talk from shortness of breath due to congestive heart failure. The diuretics were not working without his physical therapy and activity. He would not look at me anymore as he was upset and wanted to know why I was not allowed inside. It was hard for him to hear and stand up with his walker to converse with me. He was spending almost all day in bed. The isolation from his family was causing his mental and physical well-being to deteriorate. When I called to tell the staff that Dad had asked me to come in to be with him, I was told that only “End of Life” residents got to have visitors. As a medical provider, I knew my Dad had only a year at best to live. I had been in quarantine and had no signs of infection of Covid. Another issue was that traveling nurses were allowed inside the facility from all other parts of Kansas, yet I was not allowed. This made no scientific sense. My Dad was a veteran, a retired Captain from the USAR and I was not going to watch him live his last days through the window.

The cost of private pay at this facility was over \$7,000 dollars per month. I asked Dad if he wanted to come back to live with us. He burst into tears. I called his primary care physician that day and had him dismissed. When the staff wheeled him outside to my care, he just clung to me and dug his fingers into my shoulders when I got close enough for him to touch me. I had never seen my 83 year-old father be so emotional and grateful! For the next two weeks when I sat close to him, he would hug and cling to me until I had to pull his arms from around me to leave for work. The rules of isolation for elderly are cruel and inhumane.

Not every family is as fortunate as my Dad who had a daughter capable of caring for all his medical needs. He was able to spend the last year of his life hugging his grandchildren, celebrating his last birthday and having his family close by his side.

Respectfully,

Kristi Schmitt

Nurse Practitioner, LTC, USA Ret.