



Editorial from the Secretary

New system providing more oversight of children's care is working

BY LIZ DUDEK

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I am proud of the systems the Agency for Health Care Administration and our partners have implemented in the past year to ensure that medically complex children residing in pediatric nursing facilities, and their families, have our nurse care coordinators as another set of eyes and ears in the health-care setting chosen by the parents.

The nurse care coordinators visit each pediatric facility at least monthly. Most often, everything is as it should be. On those rare occasions when it is not, AHCA is there to ensure the situation is promptly corrected.

The facts described in a recent story in The Miami Herald are simply a restatement of the facts first identified by AHCA's Nurse Care coordinator and subsequently remedied by AHCA's provider monitoring and regulatory staff who are charged with inspecting facilities and requiring corrections, when needed.

This cross-division collaboration is exactly what should have happened to ensure that pediatric facilities provide excellent care for their residents, and when they do not that they are appropriately sanctioned and implement immediate corrective action. The agency expects all health-care facilities we license to maintain regulatory compliance to ensure the health and safety of those they care for.

We expect the licensed facilities to maintain contact with the parents and guardians of the children in their care, and to collaborate and discuss the child's plan of care and individual education plan. As the agency became more involved in ensuring parents are well informed about the choices they have concerning where and how their children receive nursing services — in a pediatric nursing facility or in the home — we have emphasized the importance of parental involvement in this process.

A parent's decision as to where his or her medically complex or medically fragile child will receive the best possible care — in the parent's home or in a pediatric nursing facility — is an extremely difficult, personal and individualized decision. It is incorrect, irresponsible and unfair to attack individual parents for deciding that placement in a nursing home is "child abandonment" simply because a particular parent does not wish to discuss that decision with AHCA staff after it has been made. Parents have no legal or ethical obligation to discuss with AHCA employees the choices they previously made regarding their child's care location.

All said, the choices made by parents of medically complex children have come under undue scrutiny. Parents of medically complex children are more informed now than ever before as to their choices. And, as a result of the agency's efforts, medically complex children have more staff looking out for their health and welfare, and the specialized facilities that serve them are under consistent monitoring. The improved system of care coordination and facility oversight is working.

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