

CITY TO YANK LICENSE

Nursing home allegedly starved residents

OKAYAMA (Kyodo) A nursing home in Tsuyama, Okayama Prefecture, is facing sanctions for not feeding its elderly residents properly, causing them to suffer severe weight loss, the city said Thursday.

The city said it will rescind the license of Group Home Ring as a care-giving institution on April 30 under the Nursing Care Insurance Law.



The nursing care facility Group Home Ring in Tsuyama, Okayama Prefecture, has been accused by local officials of abusing its elderly residents. KYODO PHOTO

It is the first time such a facility will be stripped of the designation by a local government due to abuse of residents, according to the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry. Group Home Ring was accredited by the Okayama Prefectural Government in 2004 as a facility for elderly patients with senile dementia.

An inspection by the city in March found that the home's five residents at that time, all women in their 70s and 80s, lost between 4.5 and 17 kg after being admitted to the facility, according to the municipal government.

Three of the women lost more than 10 kg, and a doctor who examined them said it is questionable the facility was providing them with proper nutrition.

"The residents were given substantially reduced meals and were in a state of low nutrition," said Yoji

Shimada, chief of the city's section in charge of elder care.

The staff at Group Home Ring "were aware of their physical conditions but failed to take proper action," Shimada told a news conference.

One of the residents weighed 45 kg when she was admitted at the beginning of 2007. As of last month, she weighed only 28 kg, according to the city.

Another woman's weight fell to 33.5 kg from 50 kg during her 10-month stay at the facility.

During the inspection, the facility's operator also falsely reported to the city that its manager worked on-site, but that person in fact never showed up, city officials said.

When it was told by city inspectors in March that the home was not giving medical care to underweight patients, the operator said it would give the patients sufficient care in consultation with their doctors. However, the city said it believes no such action was taken.

The group home denied any wrongdoing.

"We have never mistreated our patients and the city's allegations are fabrications since all our charges have been seeing their doctors twice a month," its chief, Satoshi Fujii, said. "We will protest the planned punishment because it's clearly a mistake and we are outraged by it."

A health insurance organization in Okayama Prefecture received an anonymous call in October 2006 alleging that Group Home Ring was denying meals to residents as punishment when they refused to obey orders from the staff.

The organization alerted the Tsuyama Municipal Government, but the city at that point was unable to find evidence of abuse and the facility denied the allegation, the officials said.

Relatives of the residents have complained since 2006 about the way their kin were being treated,

prompting the city to call on the home to rectify its conduct.

In another case of alleged misconduct, a local labor standards inspection office accused the group home of not paying ¥900,000 in wages to staff and took the matter to prosecutors March 24.

According to the health ministry, there were at least 53 reported cases of elder abuse, including those committed at nursing-care facilities, in the first year after a law aimed at preventing elder abuse took effect in April 2006.

A nursing home in Kagoshima Prefecture was found in September 2006 to have had male and female residents bathe together.

The same month, about 20 residents of an unlicensed home for the elderly in Okayama were found with unexplained injuries.

In February 2007, a care facility in Urayasu, Chiba Prefecture, which was not registered with relevant authorities, was found to have been abusing its residents and confining some of them in cages.

It was learned last June that a female nurse had pried loose the toenails of four senile patients in a hospital in Fukuoka Prefecture.

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