

**GLOOMY**  
Fog and clouds remain for most the day, followed by drizzle and rain tonight.  
Forecast, F12  
50¢  
\$2.40 per week by carrier

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## First-ever survey gauges satisfaction at nursing homes

Overall, independently owned and operated facilities scored highest in resident satisfaction in the survey of the state's 92 nursing homes.

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For the first time, the state Department of Health today will answer a crucial question: In which Rhode Island nursing homes are the residents most happy?

The department is releasing, and posting online, the results of surveys of nursing home residents and their relatives about

such matters as whether the food is tasty, the staff respectful and the activities interesting.

These satisfaction surveys, paid for by the nursing homes and mandated by state law, add a new dimension to the wealth of comparative data about nursing homes.

Consumers have long been able to learn how well every nursing home performs on state health inspections and on managing clinical issues such as infections, pain and bed sores. But until now, there has been no public information on whether

SEE SURVEY, A2

### Survey

Continued from Page A1

residents are happy and comfortable, and what their relatives think of the services at the state's 92 nursing homes.

The surveys were conducted by an independent survey company starting in April, with more than 3,000 residents interviewed face to face and 4,000 relatives answering mail surveys.

"People live in nursing homes," said Dr. David R. Gifford, the state health director. "It's the 'home' part of it. This looks at a lot of the domains that are relative to living in the home."

Gifford urged residents and their relatives to examine the results and ask nursing home administrators what they're doing to improve weaker ratings. He said the survey would be repeated in a year or two.

The Health Department report — available at [www.health.ri.gov](http://www.health.ri.gov) or by calling (401) 222-2550 — compares nursing homes in Rhode Island with each other, rather than to any objective standard or national measurement. Those who ranked in the top 15 percent in the state received a score represented by three diamonds; those in the bottom 15 percent got one diamond. The remaining 70 percent got two diamonds.

Each nursing home received these diamond ratings on 13 topics, including administration, nursing care, social services, environment and laundry, and also was given an overall score. Each

According to an advance copy that the Health Department provided to the Journal, eight nursing homes earned overall scores of three diamonds from both families and residents: Ballou Home for the Aged in Woonsocket; Forest Farm Health Care Center in Middletown; Jeanne Jugan Residence in Pawtucket; Nancy Ann Nursing Home in Foster; Overlook Nursing & Rehabilitation Center in Pascoag; Scalabrini Villa in North Kingstown; Scallop Shell Nursing & Rehabilitation Center in South Kingstown; and Sunny View Nursing Home in Warwick.

Two nursing homes ranked at the bottom, with overall scores of one diamond from both families and residents: Charlesgate Nursing Center in Providence, and Cherry Hill Manor in Johnston.

"This will be a benchmark that will help us get better," said Alfred Santos, president of the Rhode Island Health Care Association, which represents many of the for-profit nursing homes in the state.

In quality-improvement meetings, nursing homes will compare notes and those with lower ratings will get ideas from those with higher ratings, he said.

Gifford said no analysis had been performed to identify the common characteristics of top-ranking nursing homes. But most of the top nursing homes were smaller than average and none was owned by a chain.

Meg Richards, a senior scientist at Quality Partners of Rhode Island, the company that managed the survey project for the Health Department, said that those ranking tops in patient satisfaction also tended to do well

surprises in there. I think it tends to be true that high quality nursing homes are delivering high quality care across the board," Richards said.

Roberta Hawkins, the state's long-term care ombudsman, said the summer had been difficult at many nursing homes, with staff getting "cantankerous" because of the heat, high turnover and understaffing. She noted that the survey shows a "glimpse at the time they were doing it," but nursing homes can change quickly.

The best nursing homes are locally owned rather than being part of chain, she said. For example, Hawkins said, at Scallop Shell in Wakefield, the administrator owns the home, and has a stable and dedicated staff — and his mother lives there!

"A corporation is not the same as committed in-state people," Hawkins said.

"You have got to face those families in church, in the grocery store and all those places. There's less of that with outside corporations."

Gifford, the health director, noted that overall, satisfaction with Rhode Island nursing homes was fairly high. The statewide average among relatives of residents was 3.6 out of a possible 4, the equivalent of 87 out of 100. Residents gave higher scores — 3.69, or the equivalent of 90 percent.

Vital Research of California conducted the surveys. Its employees interviewed more than 3,000 residents face to face, including people with mild cognitive impairment. Residents were asked such questions as "Does

Nearly 8,000 family members received mailed surveys, and 4,082 responded. Questions included, "Do the aides spend enough time taking care of the resident?" "Is the administration available to talk with you?" and "Does the nursing home seem homelike?"

Residents cared most about direct care and nursing staff, and meals and dining. Family members gave priority to facility environment and activities.

The survey was conducted twice, first on a trial basis, with the results released only to the nursing homes. The homes had about a year to make improvements before the survey was repeated, this time with the results made public. The total cost of the two rounds was about \$468,000, with each nursing home contributing a share based on size.

Quality Partners provided each nursing home with a report comparing the two surveys, and highlighting trouble areas that were of high importance to patients. It also provided a how-to-improve guide.

The nursing home satisfaction surveys are part of an ongoing state effort to measure and report on the quality of care at all health-care institutions, required by a 1998 state law. The Health Department has also produced quality of care reports on hospitals, nursing homes, and home health agencies.

The report can be found at [www.health.ri.gov/chic/performance/quality/quality27.pdf](http://www.health.ri.gov/chic/performance/quality/quality27.pdf). The technical report with details about the survey process and ratings is at [www.health.ri.gov/chic/performance/quality/quality27tech.pdf](http://www.health.ri.gov/chic/performance/quality/quality27tech.pdf)