

SENIORS FIRST



The Changing Face of Long Term Care

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Facility Succeeds at Weaning Clients Off Ventilators

- ✓ **Over the past three years, the Illinois legislature has been faithful in continuing its commitment to the five-year phase-in of the resident-centered MDS reimbursement system. We thank Illinois legislators for their ongoing dedication to quality care for Illinois seniors.**
- ✓ **We need to continue the fourth, phased-in installment of the groundbreaking, resident-centered MDS Medicaid reimbursement system at a cost of \$90 million (\$36 million GRF).**
- ✓ **The MDS reimbursement system has been extremely successful in enhancing resident health, independence and well being. We have made great advances in providing cutting edge health services to Illinois' elderly citizens. Illinois needs to build upon its track record of success.**

Editor's Note: In this story, the client's name was changed to protect her privacy and the confidentiality of her medical information.

The majority of persons entering today's nursing homes come for short-term stays, using these facilities as stepping stones from hospital to home in recovering from illness and injury. At Ballard Healthcare in Des Plaines, Illinois, many clients benefit from the facility's excellent respiratory care services program, including a very sweet lady named Helen Chase.

On average, about 160 clients receive respiratory care services at Ballard each month. Ballard has had great success in weaning clients off ventilators, including those whom doctors had thought that weaning would be impossible.

When Helen first came to Ballard, she was fully vented and suffered from a long list of medical problems. The facility's interdisciplinary team quickly went into action to start a care plan to wean Helen off of her ventilator and optimize her independence and quality of life.

The team ran into some challenges at first. They enlisted the expertise of a ear, nose and throat specialist who saw that Helen had serious issues with her tracheostomy tube and ordered a new tube that was the proper size and type for Helen's needs.

Respiratory therapists worked diligently in monitoring Helen's physical condition; using incremental weaning settings on Helen's ventilator to promote more independent breathing; measuring her oxygen levels with a pulse oximeter; and suctioning off respiratory secretions.

At first, the respiratory therapists were able to wean Helen off of her ventilator for a few hours each day. Over time, they got her off a ventilator completely, enabling Helen to breathe on her own without assistance.

Helen continues to wear a tracheostomy tube and receives oxygen at night. But, during the day, Helen's trach tube is capped and she does not even need to be attached to an oxygen source. As a result, she is able to participate in facility activity programs and enjoy meals at local restaurants with her loving husband.

"We don't just deem our clients 'unweanable,'" said Debra Sanders, director of Ballard's respiratory care department. "We do all that we can to enable our clients to get off ventilators and enjoy a higher level of independence. What makes Ballard's program truly exceptional is that all departments are trained and involved in helping clients achieve their respiratory goals."

In addition, Ballard's expert team helped Helen overcome many other medical challenges including healing her wounds, clearing up her infections, enabling her to eat independently, and making her body strong and flexible enough through therapy for Helen to progress from being bedbound to walking with a walker.

The MDS reimbursement system provides specialized funding for respiratory programs like the one benefiting Helen at Ballard Healthcare. Illinois needs to continue with the fourth installment of this reimbursement system to help Illinois seniors achieve their independence and return home.

In FY 2008, 38,000 nursing home residents returned home because of this innovative system. We must build upon Illinois' track record of success in promoting resident autonomy, health and well being.