

# Who speaks for the seniors?

The Bethlehem Gadfly coronavirus May 11, 2020

 Latest in a series of posts on the coronavirus 

*“As of May 6, 2020, we’ve had 24 deaths here in the City of Bethlehem and 54% of these deaths are associated with long-term care facilities. . . . We are starting to see an increase in deaths from our long-term care facilities. . . . We do currently have outbreaks in seven long-term care facilities in Bethlehem. The Department of Health is looking at a pilot program to test everybody in nursing homes and long-term care facilities but details about that pilot haven’t been released to date. I am only aware of one nursing home in Bethlehem that is testing all the residents and staff. We are continuing to work with the Department of Health and long-term care facilities to insure that they have appropriate infection-control measures in place, appropriate staffing and PPE. As a local Public Health Department we do not license these facilities. The licensing is through the Pennsylvania Department of Health, so we really are serving more as providing guidance and serving as a liaison to make sure that these facilities have all the resources they need during this time. We have been working actively with the state and the consulting firm that they hired, ECRI, in connecting long-term care facilities to this resource and doing virtual visits and phone consultations on infection-control practices.”*

***Bethlehem Health Bureau Director, May 8, 2020***

Gadfly is anxious.

He is 80 years old. Mrs. Gadfly has underlying physical conditions.

But Gadfly is not just anxious for himself and the Missus.

The care for nursing home/long-term care facilities during this pandemic seems to, frankly, stink.

And he’s wondering if more noise shouldn’t be made about it locally.

Gadfly — probably speaking for others — needs to be reassured.

Councilman Reynolds admirably spoke up for our local small business interests at last Council meeting.

Good.

But it may be time for someone(s) to speak up for senior care.

The *Morning Call* this morning: “Most of the patients hospitalized and most deaths in the state have been people 65 or older, and two-thirds of the deaths have been in nursing homes and long-term care facilities.”

Gadfly appreciates the info provided by the City at City Council and the “Ask the Mayors.” He has given them a tip o’ the hat.

They have sometimes been loosely called press conferences. They are far from that. No opportunity for follow up questions.

Gadfly still has questions.

*“We do currently have outbreaks in seven long-term care facilities in Bethlehem.”*

That’s a fact, but we need some perspective. What constitutes an “outbreak” — one case?, a dozen cases? And in those seven, what is the percentage of cases compared to the total capacity of the facility? And that’s seven facilities out of how many? What percentage of the total number of facilities is seven? How many facilities have had no outbreaks? Is there a list of all facilities in Bethlehem that you follow? Can you name names of the outbreak facilities? What has been the response in those facilities that have the outbreaks? Do we see any lessening, any containment? What is going on there?

*“I am only aware of one nursing home in Bethlehem that is testing all the residents and staff.”*

That’s a fact, but we need some help understanding the fact. How should we feel about this fact? How do you feel about it? Why aren’t more facilities doing testing? Why aren’t the other six with outbreaks doing testing? Should not Gadfly feel mightily distressed about the fact that

only one facility (out of how many?) is testing? If you too are distressed, what are you doing about it?

*“We have been working actively with the state and the consulting firm that they hired, ECRI, in connecting long-term care facilities to this resource and doing virtual visits and phone consultations on infection-control practices.”*

That’s a fact, but we need some sense of results. How successful, how satisfactory has your liaison with ECRI been? Confer the commentary in the Spotlight article in **Gadfly’s last post** on this subject (and tip o’ the hat to Spotlight for doing a valuable job in this era of disappearing investigative journalism at the local level): “As of April 29, ECRI had consulted with 76 facilities, or about 15% of all long-term care facilities with cases reported to the state.” How confident can I be that Bethlehem facilities are part of those minimal 76-15% facilities with which ECRI has consulted? Forgive Gadfly, he is not all that confident. Bigger picture, how do you feel about this consultant as an effective response to this crisis in senior facilities? Are virtual visits and phone consultations “the answer”? If you feel that it is ineffective, are there actions you can take? For instance, could you just show up at a facility and ask — politely — to inspect? Would you be turned away?

Well, you get the idea. Gadfly still has questions. Gadfly being bitchily gadflying here, he knows. Earning his keep.

But I get it. It may not be the place of the Health Director to go too far or even at all into such territory as Gadfly wants to go.

Not her place. Above her pay grade.

Politics.

But questions still.

And I do feel that an elected official might go there. Like Councilman Reynolds did for the small business community.

I think if I were a Councilman, I would be upfront on this issue.

Our senior facilities may not be in big trouble — it's hard to judge — but we are not out of this situation yet. Long time to go. And our voice of concern should be heard state-wide.

*Cf. Aneri Pattani and Rebecca Moss, "Pa. had early plan to protect nursing homes from the coronavirus, but never fully implemented it." Spotlight PA, May 9, 2020. (Also in the print edition of this morning's Morning Call.)*