

CHAPTER 24

Long-Term Care Facilities*

A. NATURE AND COMPOSITION

The past three decades have seen the emergence of a new type of facility—the nursing home. Prior to the 1930's, only a handful so-called nursing homes were in existence. In succeeding years, their growth accelerated rapidly, brought about by a combination of medical, social, and economic changes in our society. The impetus was given by the enactment of the Social Security Act of 1935, which made public assistance funds available to the needy except inmates of public institutions. As a result, proprietary and nursing homes began to flourish. In 1939, there were approximately 1,200 nursing, convalescent, and rest homes throughout the country having a bed capacity of about 25,000.

Meanwhile, medical advances were extending life expectancy to a high level, resulting in a rapidly growing older population. Acute, infectious diseases were giving way to degenerative, long-term diseases as major causes of illness and death. Patterns of housing and living were changing, and increased employment opportunities for women were reducing the number available at home to care for older family members. At the same time, the general attitude concerning institutional care was changing considerably. Gradually, the nursing home was recognized as having an important role in the total medical picture.

In 1954, the Congress amended the Hospital Survey and Construction (Hill-Burton) Act to emphasize the need for long-term care facilities.

Funds were specifically authorized to assist in the construction of public and voluntary nonprofit skilled nursing homes, chronic disease hospitals, and hospitals.

At that time there were just over 265,000 long-term care beds in the country, including beds in chronic disease hospitals and skilled nursing homes.

With the advent of "medicare," national concern over nursing home care or "extended care facilities"—their availability, kinds and quality of service provided, and future prospects—has reached a new level. Today, some 13,500 nursing homes with a capacity of 550,000 beds are licensed to operate in the 50 States, District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.¹ In addition, there are approximately 70,000 beds for nursing in chronic disease hospitals or in long-term units of general hospitals. Across the country, the number of long-term care beds

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¹ Unpublished data from Hill-Burton State plans submitted to the Division of Hospital and Medical Facilities, Public Health Service; and from the American Nursing Home Association.