

Nurse who exposed conditions at Massachusetts nursing home dies from COVID-19

By Andrew Timon
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Maria Krier, the nurse who helped expose gross negligence in the coronavirus outbreak at the Life Care Center of Nashoba Valley (LCC-NV) nursing home in Littleton, Massachusetts, passed away April 10 from COVID-19, which she had contracted at the home. According to LCC-NV, Maria had become ill two weeks prior and tested positive for the coronavirus.

Krier's death is but one tragic outcome of the appalling conditions faced by millions of residents and staff alike at nursing homes in New England and throughout the US. The *New York Times* has identified 2,500 senior and elder care locations with more than 21,000 residents and staff members who have contracted COVID-19. More than 3,800 have died. In Massachusetts, about half of the more than 1,400 deaths have been in nursing homes.

After the first case of infection at the LCC-NV nursing home was confirmed March 28, and the day after an LCC-NV resident was taken to a local hospital, Krier told a news outlet, "There is no initiative to protect the nurses and patients." The LCC-NV had taken no preventative safety measures, save for issuing a no visitor policy in early March, either before the first positive test, when symptoms began, or subsequently.

Both patients and staff were kept in the dark as to the initial infections, allowing the virus to spread unabated. Krier raised the alarm, saying, "They discovered this particular woman had it, they never told anybody, like, we kept waiting for the bomb to drop, like, when are you going to tell us we're exposed to it?"

It was not until after the Littleton Fire Department had responded to the facility an astounding 18 times, transporting 16 patients to the hospital within just the last five days of March alone, that the town of Littleton

raised concerns over LCC and patients were tested. Littleton issued a statement April 2 confirming the planned mobilization of the Massachusetts National Guard (MNG) the following day to conduct testing at nursing facilities. After this unprecedented outbreak, the MNG only tested patients and not a single one of the 204 LCC-NV employees.

According to an LCC-NV "numbers update" released April 10, of the 109 residents at the center, 98 have been tested revealing 67 positive cases, not including the 10 residents who have already passed away from the virus, and 2 tests were still pending.

Out of 204 employees, 75 are out sick, with only 29 workers being tested, of which 14 tested positive, 9 negative, with 6 tests still pending. Seventeen employees who are presumed to be positive, showing COVID-19 symptoms, have not yet been tested.

The update states: "Due to ongoing limitations in availability of testing, we do not have a mechanism to request that all staff be tested. Tests are being handled by each individual employee in consultation with their doctor." There is a seed of truth in this callous statement. Certainly, the criminal negligence of LCC-NV is not to be understated, but it also cannot be analyzed in a vacuum.

LCC-NV representatives apparently stonewalled public health officials beginning to identify close contacts with the person who tested positive. However, the MNG not testing employees—along with the difficulties health care, grocery, transit and other essential workers across the country with symptoms face receiving testing—exposes the criminal neglect of the entire ruling class and political apparatus that for decades, through bipartisan efforts, has decimated

health care and other crucial social infrastructure and services.

Billionaire Forrest L. Preston is the sole owner of Life Care Centers of America (LCCA), parent company of LCC-NV. LCCA owns over 200 nursing, Alzheimer's and dementia care, inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation, and assisted and independent living facilities in 28 states, including the nursing home in Kirkland, Washington where at least 35 deaths from COVID-19 were linked in the early days of the outbreak.

Experience from the outbreak in Kirkland should have given impetus to significant changes in all LCCA facilities. But the LCCA's history of subordinating the wellbeing of patients to profits extends back long before the pandemic.

In October of 2016, LCCA had to pay a \$145 million government settlement, in connection with allegations from January 2006 to February 2013, for systematically prescribing unnecessary rehabilitation therapy to patients, as well as keeping them in facilities "longer than was necessary in order to continue billing for rehabilitation therapy, even after the treating therapists felt that therapy should be discontinued," according to a press release from the US Department of Justice.

The settlement also resolved a separate lawsuit by the United States against Preston who, "as the sole shareholder of Life Care, was unjustly enriched by Life Care's fraudulent scheme." The tragic deaths of Maria Krier and residents of LCC-NV is just one of countless examples of workers speaking out on their unmet needs to safely carry out and fulfill their work for society, but resulting in needless deaths when their warnings were not heeded.

Boeing is one recent example of the criminalization of the corporate ruling elite in the drive for profits. Repeated warnings from engineers and pilots of the safety dangers of the new Boeing 737 Max 8 were ignored. Only after two planes crashed killing 346 people were the planes finally grounded.

With Preston's current wealth of \$1.7 billion, workers and residents at every LCCA facility whose payments and labor have enriched their sole owner should have ample access to PPEs and any other means necessary to keep employees and residents safe.

The impending catastrophe exposed by Maria Krier has played out at nursing homes across Massachusetts.

Just some of these cases include:

- Belmont Manor Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, where the virus has killed 30 patients;
- AdviniaCare in Willmington, where 77 out of 98 nursing home residents tested positive;
- The Soldiers' Home in Holyoke, where 44 veteran residents have died from COVID-19, the majority of them over the past two weeks.

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