Rising number of COVID-19 deaths in Germany's retirement and care homes

By Elisabeth Zimmermann
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As the German government is effectively ending the coronovirus lockdown measures, reports about people dying of COVID-19 in retirement and care homes are increasing.

Over the weekend four people, three men and one woman, died of the coronavirus in the Protestant retirement and nursing home of the Inner Mission in Planegg, Bavaria. On Friday, the health department of the city of Mönchengladbach confirmed the death of an 82-year-old resident at the St. Antonius retirement home.

German nursing homes have become death traps in the coronavirus pandemic, making clear that is not only in the United States, Italy and Spain where COVID-19 has rampaged out of control.

According to figures from the Robert Koch Institute released on April 23, around 1,500 residents of retirement and nursing homes had died of a coronavirus infection. At that time, this amounted to almost a third of all COVID-19 deaths in Germany and the number of unreported cases is certainly much higher.

There are no official statistics on confirmed coronavirus cases in homes for the elderly and there is no proper register of cases in outpatient care. Around 800,000 people live in retirement and nursing homes in Germany.

Conditions in some of the homes are nightmarish. For example, 23 people died of COVID-19 in the Maternus retirement home in Cologne, according to a report in Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR) on April 29. The WDR had received information from staff at the home. The Cologne retirement home cares for 140 people in assisted living quarters and 75 in the care sector. The home is operated by the Berlin-based company Cura GmbH.

A few weeks ago, more than 50 residents of the home and about two dozen staff were infected, including the head of the facility. Employees reported anonymously on their shocking experiences at the start of the coronavirus crisis. Staff brought residents with clear symptoms of the virus to surrounding clinics, from where they were sent back to the nursing home without being tested.

As in almost all nursing homes affected by the coronavirus outbreaks, the lack of sufficient personnel and protective equipment is the main reason for the rapid spread of the virus and subsequent high death rates for residents already in poor health. Staff and residents of the home told the WDR that they were highly fearful for the future.

Dramatic scenes also took place the week before Easter in the Sankt Monika nursing home just a few kilometers away. The home near the city of Bonn is run by Caritas. Thirty-seven of the 70 residents and 38 nurses tested positive for the coronavirus. Infected residents were transferred to hospitals.

The national civil protection department had to temporarily take over care of non-infected residents because most of the nursing staff in the home had been infected. Subsequently, some infected nursing staff were forced back to work from their home quarantine after just one week instead of the prescribed two in order to maintain operation of the nursing home. The procedure has been officially allowed for a few days.

The reprehensible behavior of the care home management and local authorities is not an isolated case. In other regions, care home operators and authorities have also shown indifference to the health risks confronting care workers and residents.

In mid-April it was revealed that 21 out of 104 residents and 15 employees in a home for the elderly in Duisburg were infected. Four residents were taken to

hospital and three have died of COVID-19 in the past few weeks. After further tests, the number of infected residents and employees increased to 46.

In Würzburg, 25 residents in the St. Nikolaus retirement home and 19 residents of another retirement home have died of COVID-19. In the district of Fürth, which like Würzburg is located in the state of Bavaria, 23 people died of coronavirus in one home and 18 in another city in the region.

There are similar cases in other cities and states. Hospitals, clinics and other facilities have been repeatedly affected by outbreaks of the pandemic.

Radio Westphalia reported eight infected patients and employees at the Gollwitzer-Meier clinic in Bad Oeynhausen, a rehabilitation clinic for those suffering from heart and vascular diseases. All 170 inpatients and 170 employees are now being tested for the virus.

Radio Berlin Brandenburg reported on April 30 that 81 patients and 70 employees in the Brandenburg Clinic in Bernau have now tested positive for COVID-19. Fifteen have died of the infection.

According to the Barnim district administration, all of the deceased patients suffered from serious and in some cases incurable illnesses. This is a statement which is used by politicians to downplay the dangers of the coronavirus and divert attention from their own negligence. The fact is that the victims would probably still be alive if they had been properly shielded from COVID-19.