

Workshops set for nursing home volunteers

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SANTA CRUZ — Citizens For Better Nursing Home Care is sponsoring workshops through May for nursing home volunteers.

The workshops are also a chance for the public to discover facts about nursing homes and other long-term care facilities.

Five workshops will be held from 1 to 4 p.m. on Thursdays starting March 22 at the Aptos Public Library.

Topics will cover the history of the nursing home ombudsman program, licensing of facilities, long-term care financing and patient's rights.

Nursing home field studies for volunteer ombudsmen will be held from 1 to 4 p.m. on Tuesday from March 27 to May 8.

Citizens For Better Nursing Home Care sponsors the ombudsman/advocate program, which is mandated by law to represent nursing home residents in investigating and resolving

complaints about facilities.

Chief ombudsman Cheryl Bentley said there are now 30 volunteer ombudsmen, but 70 are needed to cover all the county nursing homes and residential care homes, also known as board and care homes.

Volunteers are asked to give two hours per week for a year.

Many people don't know where to turn when an elderly family member or friend is too frail to continue living at home. Bentley said the ombudsman office receives five to 10 calls a day from people seeking information about long-term care facilities.

"They are people in a quandry as to what to do. Sometimes they're looking for a facility, but don't really want to take that option. They don't understand there are other options."

When it comes to finding a nursing home

for a loved one, "there's a lot of guilt," said Bentley. "Some callers just want someone to talk to. It's a very difficult situation for people."

The ombudsman office "is one of the few places people can find out information about nursing homes," said Bentley. "Unfortunately, the need for knowing about the different facilities is something that can touch almost anyone's life."

The Ombudsman/Advocate program is financially supported by county revenue sharing funds, Community Mental Health Services, the Seniors Council and United Way.

The first workshop on March 22 will discuss ombudsmen skills: observation, empathy and communication.

For more information, call the ombudsman office, 429-1913 or 688-8833.