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Former Pasadena Care Facility Faces Lawsuit, Possible Criminal Investigation After Patient's Death

The facility has been decertified, renamed and has changed ownership since a patient's suicide last year.

By Lolita Lopez
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A Pasadena long-term care facility promised changes Wednesday following the death of a patient last year, while its former owner faces a lawsuit and possible criminal investigation.

Seventeen of the 156 beds at the Mission Grove Healthcare and Wellness Centre, formerly the South Pasadena Convalescent Hospital, were filled while the facility worked to increase staff and make other changes to ensure better care for those in need of long term health care.

The changes come nearly a year after 57-year-old Courtney Cargill, a convalescent home resident who had a mental illness, walked out of the facility, went to two local gas stations, and set herself on fire.

"She didn't get a lot of the help that she needed," said her sister, Casey Cargill. "She was a very high achiever until she developed mental illness."

Molly Davies, a representative of the city and County of **Los Angeles Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program**, which investigates claims of abuse or neglect at long term care facilities in LA County, said "what happened to her is one in a constellation of other victims."

Davies had contacted the California Department of Public Health about the convalescent home previously.

"The facility lost — failed — four

certification surveys," Davies said. "That is not something that happens all the time."

In January, the convalescent home was one of only four nursing facilities to be decertified in California since 2012, and no longer receives Medi-Cal or Medicare funds, according to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

The facility was also issued 25 citations and \$198,000 in fines by the California Department of Public Health, department officials said.

The former convalescent home's residents included not only the elderly, but also felons, drug users, and rapists, according to South Pasadena Police Chief Art Miller, who is pursuing criminal action in Cargill's death.

"I am seeking some type of either homicide, negligent homicide or a homicide prosecution," Miller said.

Cargill's family has filed a lawsuit against the facility's former owner, Shlomo Rechnitz, who had owned the South Pasadena Convalescent Hospital since 2006, is an owner or co-owner of 57 nursing facilities across the state, and was recently blocked from buying any more facilities.

Between October 2014 and January 2015, three of Rechnitz's facilities were decertified, according to the CDPH.

Rechnitz did not respond to requests for comment.



The family is also suing the South Pasadena Rehabilitation Center, which refuted Miller's claims.

"We can say unequivocally that the allegations made by the South Pasadena police chief are unfounded," said center spokeswoman Sallie Hofmeister. "As for his allegations of fraud in caring for this patient population, such statements are equally baseless and reflect a 'NIMBY' phenomenon that has eliminated options for these underserved patients."

Pasadena officials and family members of facility residents hope that the home's new ownership will spur change locally, and in the long term care system in general.

"I think there are many, many more Courtney Cargills out there," Miller said. "If we don't do something about it, bad things are going to happen to innocent people and families."