

Grant raises questions on nursing homes' future

By Steven Scarpa January 15, 2007

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A new federal grant that would make it easier for the elderly to receive Medicaid and stay at home is raising questions about the future impact on nursing homes. The state is receiving a \$24.2 million federal grant to help people move from nursing homes and other care facilities back to their homes. The project, which has the support of Gov. M. Jodi Rell, is known as "Money Follows the Person." The state Department of Social Services estimated that 700 people with disabilities will be able to transition from nursing home care back home over the next five years. "The idea is to use Medicaid dollars as flexibly as possible to give people more choices about their living situation," Rell said in a statement issued Wednesday. The idea is this: The federal government

will increase Medicaid funding, reimbursing the state for 75 percent of the costs for the first year back in the community, according to a statement from the governor's office. In addition, Medicaid will cover around-the-clock assistance. For example, if a family member who worked all day needed care for an elderly loved one during that time period, Medicaid would help pay for that time, as well as any services needed at home. Joseph Stango, a Southbury resident, began lobbying the state in January 2006 to do something to help people like him. He had hoped to have his 83-year-old mother, Dora, come home to live with him, but limits to what Medicaid would pay for in terms of care blocked that aspiration. Through persistence and a chance meeting with Rell, Stango made his pitch to state legislators. "There is definitely a human rights element here," he said. Please see [Nursing homes](#) /8

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"There is no reason in today's world that anybody should be forced into a nursing home who doesn't want to be there." Dora Stango has some health difficulties, her son said, but he is looking forward to having her home soon. "She can continue to make a contribution to our family by sitting at the table with us and telling her grandchildren her stories," Stango said. Nursing home professionals support the new program, but have some concerns about what it will mean for the future of their business. "It is a very innovative progressive approach that the federal government is going to find alternative and appropriate placement for folks with disabilities," said Brandon Munson, administrator of the Miller Memorial Community in Meriden. "The way the state administers the system now, the problem is that it is too rigid." Munson said the state funding would allow more people to live at home, leaving a sicker population forced to live in nursing homes. Sick people require more services than they actually pay for, Munson said. Without relatively healthy people paying the same rates to balance it off, nursing homes could face a financial problem, especially with gradually decreasing patronage. "The demographics of nursing homes are going to change," Munson said. Despite that, Munson supports the new program and believes that Miller Memorial can still have a place in it by extending its services out into the community and being a general clearinghouse of information. Stephen Mc Pherson, president and CEO of Masonic Health Care Center in Wallingford, would also consider reinstating the center's adult day care programs if the program takes off. Masonicare offers a full spectrum of care options, from assisted living to more intensive eldercare. "The most appropriate setting is critical for care delivery," he said. Baby boomers, who are now entering their twilight years, engage the health care system differently than their parents did. They also tend to be healthier than previous generations, Mc Pherson said. These factors have no choice but to change the way health care is administered. "The current system cannot support the demand placed upon it," Mc Pherson said. sscarpa@record-journal.com (203) 317-2225