

Tender Loving Greed

By MARY ADELAIDE MENDELSON
Random House, \$2.45

This is the premier work on nursing home investigation. In it Mrs. Mendelson exposes in shocking and minute detail the years of abuse and profiteering that have come to characterize all too much of America's health care industry.

Ten painstaking years went into the research for "Tender Loving Greed." Mrs. Mendelson spent \$20,000 of her own money, an investment she could afford because of a small legacy left by her mother, who spent her last years in a "supposedly excellent" nursing home.

THE RESULTS of the book, first issued in paperback in March, will continue to be felt in legislatures and nursing homes across the country for years. It is singularly responsible for the exposure of gross abuses of the Medicaid system in New York, of the resulting Stein Commission investigation and John Hess's probing coverage in the New York Times and for finally prompting the balking Senate Subcommittee on Long Term Care to make public its findings after an incredibly long 15 years of "fact gathering."

It must be noted that Sen. Frank Moss, subcommittee chairman, tried unsuccessfully to block publication of "Tender Loving Greed." Moss and his staff told Mrs. Mendelson's publisher that the work was a "blanket indictment of an entire industry," and "a pile of garbage."

Yet Moss's committee reports draw many of the same conclusions as Mrs. Mendelson. The introductory committee report, "Nursing Home Care in the U.S.: Failure in Public Policy," concluded: "... millions of older Americans who have already re-

ceived care in nursing homes have not received maximum help. In many cases they have not even received humane treatment. And in an alarming number of known cases, they have actually encountered abuse and physical danger, including unsanitary conditions, fire hazards, poor or unwholesome food, infections adverse drug reactions, overtranquilization, and frequent medication errors. In addition, they have been exposed to negligence on the part of nursing home personnel. The net impact is that far too many patients have needlessly sustained injury, and, in some cases death . . . The United States — and particularly its older citizens — cannot afford more failure in our nursing homes. We have already paid too much in dollars, and our elders have paid too high a price in despair and suffering."

But Mrs. Mendelson does more than find the wrongs of nursing home care. She does not engage in societal hand-wringing, but rather documents with sometimes disgusting detail, the sinister pattern of deprivation of nursing home patients by operators intent on extracting maximum profit from shrivelled bodies with total disregard for dependent human beings.

ON FIRST READING, the book seems shrill and an uninitiated reader will surely turn away muttering, "It can't be that bad." But the sad truth, documented by the senate subcommittee and dozens of other investigators across the country, is that it can and is that bad in all-too-many shocking instances.

Patients and their families should welcome the book, not as a nightmarish account of what must happen to them, but a valuable tool to use in insuring that the abuse and neglect are not visited upon them.

Reviewed by JANE DAUGHERTY

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