

At Home in Georgia; Respecting Choice and Ensuring Safe Care

November 19, 2013 (submitted)

Augusta Chronicle

Dr. Kenneth Fuller's editorial ("[Closure of Georgia hospitals endangers mental health care](#)," Nov. 17) is like water in a dry desert: refreshingly right and necessary, but painfully scarce. I share completely his concerns about Georgia's misguided effort to evict fragile, disabled citizens from their homes.

In 2010, without legislative approval or notice to individuals and their families, and contrary to the Supreme Court's [Olmstead](#) decision supporting choice, Georgia and the U.S. Department of Justice entered a settlement agreement that requires the closure of Georgia "hospitals" – specialized residential programs (ICFs/IID) for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). Aptly called "safety nets" by Dr. Fuller, Georgia's hospitals provide life-sustaining care to Georgia's most fragile citizens.

My daughter, Erica, is one such citizen. She has profound I/DD and is medically fragile. She has a seizure disorder, osteoporosis, kyphosis, hypothermia, and a swallow reflex disorder that requires her to be fed by a g-tube. She is well served at Gracewood hospital in Augusta.

I agree with Dr. Fuller that both quality community and facility-based care is needed. For some, like Erica, her facility is her community and she receives far more specialized care at Gracewood than she will ever receive in a smaller, unlicensed settings. Medical care is not immediately available in community settings – a dangerous proposition for many current residents, like my daughter. Would we tell an ICU patient to go home and hope there is not a medical crisis requiring immediate attention?

The "deinstitutionalization" pendulum, born of good intentions decades ago, has swung too far. It is my hope that families, professionals and advocates can convince state and federal elected officials and lawyers to take a step back and embrace quality care over quotes. My Erica and her peers across the State are at *home*. Evicting them only ensures more tragic headlines.

[Ann S. Knighton](#)

Augusta, Georgia

President, East Central Georgia Regional Hospital (Gracewood)

President, VOR – a national organization advocating for high quality care and human rights for all people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (www.vor.net)