

POLITICO

MAGAZINE

THE BIG IDEA

The Crisis Facing Nursing Homes, Assisted Living and Home Care for America's Elderly

Hundreds of thousands of workers are leaving the caregiving industry. Unless immigration policies and industry standards change, an aging U.S. is going to face drastic consequences.

July 28TH, 2022



Momah Wolapaye has worked at Goodwin Living since emigrating to the U.S. He says he was raised to revere elderly people; he had cared for his own father before he died. When the virus came for Goodwin Living, Wolapaye volunteered to work with Covid-positive residents. "This is what I signed up for, as a Certified Nursing Assistant," he said. "Someone has to take responsibility and risk their life." Here, Wolapaye chats with Goodwin House Alexandria resident Joan Vogel, as he starts his shift in July 2022.

December blurred to January, and the night shift blurred into the day shift, as Momah Wolapaye, 53, rotated warm towels beneath the bedridden at the nursing care wing for the Covid-positive. Repositioning the residents every two hours prevented bed sores, and normally took two aides, but now only one was permitted in rooms. Straws were also forbidden, so after giving sponge baths, Wolapaye spoon-fed sips of water to the elderly, checked their breathing and skin coloration, and calmed the anxious who called into the night silence.

Most didn't understand why they were suddenly in new rooms, sealed with painter's plastic, and why they needed masks. Some wanted to leave, and Wolapaye spent 20 of the 30 minutes inside each room calming them and explaining "the virus." It was December 2020, the pandemic's second wave, and all but three staff on his team had caught Covid. His supervisor asked if he could work 16-hour shifts. He agreed. He tied his blue uniform in a plastic bag when he got home in the morning, told his sons not to touch it, and returned to work that evening to Goodwin Living, a long-term care community in D.C.'s suburbs.

"It's my responsibility, being there with the residents. I take them to be like my own people."

**- Momah Wolapaye,
Care Partner, Goodwin Living**

To our friend and colleague, Momah Wolapaye, for extraordinary dedication to the Goodwin Living mission and sharing your story to promote a better future for immigrants who serve in senior living and for the older adults they serve.

- Your Goodwin Living Family

