



March 8, 2024

*Sent via email*

Donna Jerry  
Senior Health Policy Analyst  
Green Mountain Care Board  
114 State Street  
Montpelier, VT 05633-3601

Dear Donna:

Please accept this letter on behalf of the University of Vermont Health Network in support of Birchwood Terrace Rehab and Healthcare, as they seek to add 16 beds to their existing capacity. As the President and COO of UVM Health Network – Home Health & Hospice and President and COO of UVM Medical Center, we both see firsthand the rising need in our community for rehabilitative and long-term care supports. It has been well-reported that our family members and neighbors are experiencing long waits in the hospital to find a safe and appropriate place to recover and heal from injury or illness. While home is the preferred setting of care for most Vermonters, it isn't always possible immediately following discharge from the hospital.

Birchwood Terrace is a high quality, 5-star, nursing home and residential care facility that fills this need with a full range of post-acute care and services. An expansion of their capacity would have a direct impact on our health care system's ability to meet patients' needs by ensuring that every individual is receiving the care they need in the right place at the right time. Each day we are performing the difficult task of deciding how to use the available post-acute care "slots" for a growing number of patients whose care needs are not matched to their current setting, whether that be in a hospital, at home, or in a family member's home.

At UVM Health Network – Home Health & Hospice, which is also a post-acute care provider, we are pushing every day to expand our capacity to meet the increasing volume of patients who need care. Our limitations are predominantly staffing based; a workforce crisis that is not unique to post-acute care or to Vermont. The fact that Birchwood is able to bring on an additional 16 beds to serve our community members is remarkable and we support the immediate approval of this request.

In February 2024, the UVM Medical Center requested placement for 225 patients to a post-acute setting with only 135 of those resulting in a confirmed acceptance while the remaining 90 patients have a status of waiting or declined. This need is expected to increase as our population ages. Specifically, the population over the age of 65 is forecast to grow by 14.8% in the Burlington HSA in the next 5 years.

Finally, it is worth noting that, while the full effects of the pandemic have receded, the impact of COVID-19 persists – and in the case of our post-acute system of care, continue to drive a near-crisis level of challenges. The most profound impact is on staffing. The systems that fund our providers are still catching-up to the realities of today, which in turn means it is even more difficult to hire and retain the talented staff we need to provide necessary care to our community members. Everyone in our health care system in this region – and even the country – is continuing to face this reality, but the pressures are so much more acute in the post-acute system of care.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,



Christine Werneke  
President and COO  
UVM Health Network – Home Health and Hospice



Stephen Leffler, MD  
President and COO  
University of Vermont Medical Center