

Opinions

The cruise ships in our backyard

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It is tragic but not surprising that nursing homes should suffer such heavy losses from covid-19. When it comes to a contagious pathogen, nursing homes are like cruise ships, with large numbers of people confined to finite spaces and sharing common dining and recreation areas. Except nursing homes come with a smaller crew that has repeated, hands-on contact with an aging and often sickly population that requires assistance with intimate daily tasks.

Historically, nursing homes in the United States evolved to srea Uquiheh

What is needed urgently in this pandemic is a crisis task force and czar to take on nursing homes. Just as hospital ships were dispatched to covid-19 hot spots, state and federal governments need to send meaningful assistance in the form of medical reserve personnel and equipment to every nursing home to help them prepare and prevent as best they can. An effort evolving along these lines in Massachusetts might be a model for other states. Rapid on-site virus testing, monitoring and screening of patients and personnel, already so hard to do in the best settings, is unlikely to happen in nursing homes without such direct intervention.

Critically, there is a pressing need for on-