

chapter 11

## PROTECTION FROM ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Often residents are not aware they are being abused, perhaps because it has gone on for so long they don't consider it abuse, or perhaps because they suffer a mental illness which renders them incapable of recognizing abuse. Therefore, it is extremely important to be aware of their situation and note any changes that occur. The following are some things that you can do on an ongoing basis to protect the resident.

### STAY INFORMED

The resident's health may change, the staffing and administration may change, policies may change, etc. Talk regularly with the resident and establish a relationship with the resident which allows the resident to trust you. Don't ever dismiss what the resident tells you simply because the resident has dementia or some other mental illness which in your mind renders him or her "incompetent."

### EDUCATE AND EMPOWER BOTH YOURSELF AND THE RESIDENT

Utilize your resources. Resident and Family Councils, for example, are great sources of information inside the nursing home. Outside the nursing home, the Long Term Care Ombudsman is a great resource for advocates. Adult Protective Services is not only reactive, but is a preventive and supportive agency with a wealth of information. Your local Area Agency on Aging is another state agency which provides helpful information, as do outside organizations like the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and support groups sponsored by such organizations as the

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Alzheimer's Association. In today's world, the Internet is also a vast resource for all kinds of educational information relating to the rights of the elderly. Be sure to share information with the resident whenever possible. Keep in mind that the more control residents have over their lives, the fewer opportunities abusers have to take advantage of them.

### **ESTABLISH RELATIONSHIPS**

Establish relationships with the nursing home staff and with the other residents and their family members. The nursing home staff are with your loved one 24 hours a day. Get to know them. They can be your "eyes and ears" and alert you to possible abuse. Establish a relationship that is both professional and friendly. Do not speak with them only when you are expressing concern or dissatisfaction. Be sure to let them know what you are pleased with.

Other residents and their family members can be both a great support system and a significant source of information. All nursing homes are required to facilitate Resident and Family Councils. These monthly meetings of residents and family members are a way to help one another address shared concerns.

### **TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE IN THE RESIDENT'S CARE PLANNING**

Attend the monthly care plan meetings (also encourage the resident to attend whenever possible). If the resident has special needs that you are aware of, be sure to let the interdisciplinary team know. Suggest a few ways the resident's needs can be met. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Make sure you understand and agree with the care plan. Obtain a copy of the plan and be sure to follow up with the staff to ensure the care plan is being met.

If you have permission from the resident, periodically review the resident's charts. The first few times you review the chart, ask a

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staff member to review the chart with you and explain those sections which are confusing to you. Periodically review the resident's financial records, as well (provided the resident has given you permission). Make a list of the residents' personal belongings and periodically check to make sure that all belongings remain accounted for. Many residents also label their belongings for easy identification.

### **DOCUMENT YOUR CONCERNS**

When you visit the resident, keep a journal. Record your observations and keep track of patterns. Note statements made by witnesses. Be sure you record dates and times. Take photographs and videos. When reporting incidents, it helps to have clearly-defined symptoms and conditions. Accuracy is important. If you should ever need to file a complaint, detailed records enable outside parties to have an accurate description of events.