

Is Your Loved One Receiving Proper Care?

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How do you know if your loved one, in a care setting, is receiving proper care? California's Assembly Bill 1690 mandates that all care employees receive elder abuse training, but it's important that you also know the signs of improper care. Simply, you need to be observant and inquisitive.

Look at your loved one's skin, hair, mouth and lips, toes and fingernails, and genitals:

- Is the skin loose? "Pinch" the skin and see how fast (or slow) it returns to normal. If it's slow, then the individual may not be getting enough fluids or food.
- Are there scabbed-over wounds? Skin tears occur especially if the individual has a history of taking steroids, but several scabs may also indicate needless grabbing or pulling.
- Do you observe "breakdown" (bedsore) on the buttocks, heels, ears, back of the head, shoulder blade, low back, inside the knees or ankles? This shows that the individual has not been out of bed enough, been sitting too long in a wheelchair, or not turned every two hours (standard procedure). Bedsores can quickly advance into a condition that requires surgery to heal.
- Is the resident's hair combed or matted? Is it clean or flaky? Does it appear greasy or too long? These can be signs of neglect.
- Look at the lips and mouth. Does it appear that the teeth and gums have been brushed? Are the lips cracked, or the roof of the mouth cracked or bleeding? These are signs of poor care, including failure to provide liquid or the mouth has not been moistened. This frequently occurs when the individual breathes through their mouth.
- Are the nails overgrown, cracked, discolored or dirty?
- Although examining your loved one's genitals may not be something you feel comfortable doing, it is necessary to examine for redness, sores, urine or feces odor, cuts or bruising. Finding any of these things might indicate abuse and neglect.

Being inquisitive means to look at weight records. Has there been a steady decline? This may indicate loss of appetite, not taking the time to assist, or not being fed at all. Check all records regarding a "feeding schedule" and eating percentages. Perhaps visit during meal times to help or to observe how much attention is given to feeding or assisting.

Look at blood pressure records, staffing records, and read nurses notes (any recent falls or events). Reports of injuries are required to be sent to the Department



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of Health Services (nursing homes) and the Department of Social Services (residential care). As a family member you have the right to be notified of all incidents that may affect the individual's health, welfare and safety.

Look, too, at medication records to see if medications are being given as ordered by the doctor. Were any medications missed and, if so, why?

Finally, use your nose. Heavy use of air fresheners or a strong smell of disinfectant may indicate that the facility is not utilizing good care techniques to keep its occupants clean, dry and changed as often as necessary.

If you suspect that a loved one has been abused, you must take action. First talk with the facility's Administrator about how to correct the care deficiencies. Your next recourse is to call your county's Community Care Licensing (for residential care, board and care, assisted living). For skilled nursing facilities, call the State's Attorney General's office at (800) 722-0432.

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