

## Nursing Home Abuses

In 1999, an investigation by the U.S. General Accounting Office showed that 25% of the nation's 17,000 Nursing Homes "had serious deficiencies that caused actual harm to residents or placed them at risk of death or serious injury."

With over 1.5 million people living in Nursing Homes throughout the country, abuse and neglect has become a widespread problem. Even though some Nursing Homes provide good care, many are subjecting their residents to needless suffering and sometimes, even death. Most residents in Nursing Homes are dependent on the staff for most of their needs including such basics as food, water, medicine, toileting, grooming, and exercise. Unfortunately, many residents are often isolated, ignored and deprived of social contact and stimulation. Because of insufficient and poorly trained staff, commonly found in Nursing Homes, caregivers are overworked and underpaid, which results in abusive behavior to helpless residents who ask for simple needs such as help getting to the bathroom.

Nursing Home abuse may include any of the following:

- Assault (including sexual assault)
- Battery (including sexual battery)
- Rape
- Unreasonable or unnecessary restraints
- Deprivation of food and water
- Use of medications not approved by the appropriate physician

Neglect is different from abuse. It can be defined as failing to care for a resident to the degree, which a reasonable person in the same position would exercise.

Neglect may include any of the following:

- Physical neglect: disregard for the necessities of daily living
- Medical neglect: lack of care for existing medical problems
- Failure to prevent dehydration, malnutrition, and bed sores
- Failure to assist in personal hygiene, or in the provision of food, clothing, or shelter
- Unsanitary and unclean conditions
- Infections
- Failure to protect from health and safety hazards
- Poor access to medical services

Because many Nursing Homes today are under staffed, they cannot provide the simplest of needs to their residents. Residents can often be found lying in their own urine and feces, have severe bed sores, underfed, malnourished or dehydrated, over-medicated or under-medicated, with painful bruises and fractures (due to a staff member dropping them), unclean, ignored and left in bed all day... all of these are forms of neglect.

There are ways in which you can help in remedying these situations. They can be any or all of the following:

- Visit the resident frequently. Visit at different times and days so that you can see that care is provided at all times.
- Talk to the staff about your concerns, whether it's a nurse, doctor, aide or administration.
- Contact your appropriate state agency. In each state there is a division of the Department of Health, which deals with enforcement of nursing home regulations. This agency investigates complaints filed by family members. You can find out what this agency is by talking to someone at the Nursing Home; they are required to give you this information.
- If you believe the resident has been abused, file a complaint.