



ELOPEMENTS

Each year we receive claims for elopements resulting in residents being struck by vehicles, expiring from exposure to heat or cold, being physically or sexually abused, etc. In addition to the mental anguish this creates with the families and nursing home staff over losing a loved one or resident in this manner, the courts have been quite harsh in ruling that the homes were derelict in their duty to provide a safe environment for the residents.

- Develop and implement an effective wandering program.
- Establish a written protocol for locating missing residents that is accessible to staff.
- Include the protocol for notifying family, physician, the state licensure agency, and police (when indicated).
- Provide staff with in-service training of the protocol's contents during orientation and periodically, as needed.
- Develop a method to identify residents who are at risk for elopement, such as known wanderers.
- Implement appropriate interventions to prevent high-risk residents from elopement, such as periodic checks and an activity program that reduces the chance that residents will wander away.
- Document interventions in the resident care plans and communicate them to staff.
- Keep accessible current photographs of all residents identified as being at risk.
- See that identification bracelets and/or alarms are worn by residents, as indicated, and are tested according to the manufacturer's recommendations.
- Secure exit doors with alarms or keypads that are tested daily or weekly, and document the tests.
- Use a resident "check-in and out" log to keep track of your residents. Use this log anytime a resident leaves the facility by self; with family, or on facility planned outings.
- Keep records of incidents so that trends and risks can be identified and reduced.
- Have a QA committee review and discuss all elopement concerns whenever indicated.

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You are encouraged to consult with your own attorney or other expert consultants for a professional opinion specific to your situation.

