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How to detect nursing home abuse

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It didn't take long for Jonathan Rosenfeld to grab recent headlines from La Salle County and post them on his Web site: "La Salle County nursing home cited for failing to protect residents from sex abuse."

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PHOTOS



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Photo: Provided Jonathan Rosenfeld

The Illinois Department of Public Health recently released a report that said a male resident molested 10 female residents at the county home during a six-month period this year and staff did not do enough to protect the victims. The male resident has been removed from the home.

Chicago attorney Rosenfeld said he was familiar with the report on the La Salle County home, as his office reviews such reports.

Rosenfeld specializes in lawsuits involving nursing home abuse and he keeps tabs on related issues with his Web site: NursingHomesAbuseBlog.com. He offers advice on a variety of categories that would be relevant to families with loved ones in nursing homes or long-term care facilities, including how to select a nursing home. His advice also includes links to other resources and references.

Rosenfeld, of the firm of Strellis & Field, has handled 30 to 40 cases of nursing home abuse, with nine in progress. Below are some questions and answers he feels relevant. In a recent interview with The Times, he answered the following questions. Also are included are questions he feels relevant to nursing home care.

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Q: In a nursing home abuse situation, who is usually the abuser?

A: Most involve residents victimizing residents, rather than staff victimizing residents. Some cases also involve visitors victimizing residents.

Q: What challenge do investigators face in gathering evidence?

A: The victim is usually disabled or suffering from Alzheimer's disease and thus unable to help investigators. In the case of the La Salle County Nursing Home, the Illinois Department of Public Health was fortunate enough victims were able to respond to questioning. The state usually does a good job of investigating. Abuse happens more than people realize.

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Q: What is the typical reason abuse goes unchecked?

A: Short staffing. The facility may meet guidelines for proper number of staff, but it may not be what's really enough. It's dollars and cents. If they hire one or two more, they go over budget.

Q: What else creates an environment for abuse?

A: When a facility has young and old residents and the young are permitted to mix freely with the old. Another source of trouble is that a number of registered sex offenders have been found living at nursing homes. Also putting residents at risk are unsupervised visitors.

Q: What are signs of nursing home abuse?

A. Physical, mental and sexual abuse are forms of abuse encountered by nursing home residents across the country. Remember, you know your loved one better than anyone else. If you suspect mistreatment or abuse immediately report the situation to local police and/or ombudsmen. The reality is that most episodes of elder abuse go unreported.

