

SENIOR CONNECTION

A Safety Bulletin for the Senior Living Industry
From Gallagher National Risk Control

Gallagher National Risk Control

produces Senior Connection, an electronic publication promoting safety and covering insights relevant to our clients working in the senior living industry. These bulletins will enable you to review your program and provide information to assist you in strengthening your risk management plans.

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Screening residents for antecedents of adverse behaviors

By Bill O'Connor and Kris Oliveira

Introduction

As we strive to follow trends and support the senior care industry, there are increasingly disturbing statistics regarding serious behavioral health issues. According to the American Psychological Association, "It is anticipated that the number of older adults with mental and behavioral health problems will almost quadruple, from 4 million in 1970 to 15 million in 2030".¹ This creates a challenge for the already stressed senior care delivery system in terms of staff availability, proper training and support for residents and families.

Screening

Behavioral health must be included as a key screening factor when deciding upon admission to a senior care facility. The team reviewing the potential resident's risk for behavioral health challenges should include a detailed history from the family and recent caregivers if possible. Loss of loved ones, anxiety, depression, dementia and physical health challenges are all "normal" risks and aspects of aging; the key is to document findings and ensure that the staff available will match the needs and risks of the potential resident.

Sudden change without warning

The National Institute on Aging is conducting extensive research in this area. Even with careful planning and screening, we know that behavioral incidents can seemingly occur with little or no warning. For this reason, small (or large) triggers may be overlooked, ignored or undiscovered, especially if staff are changing and challenged with other tasks. Please see: [Behavioral and Psychological Factors and Aging](#) | NIA (nih.gov).

¹Psychology and aging: Psychologists make a significant contribution (apa.org)



Antecedent behaviors

There are a number of behaviors that may occur, either randomly or as part of a pattern that, we recognize as triggers for potential acting out or unsafe behavior:

- Changes in cognition (sudden confusion — can be caused by many reasons from simple dehydration to more serious urinary tract infections or other acute illnesses)
- Memory — early signs of Alzheimer's
- Increased wandering
- Increased falls
- Refusal of medications or treatment
- Lack of focus
- Resistance to care
- New pain/illness/injury
- Reaction to medication changes
- Psychosocial changes — refusing care, visitors, acting out against staff and other residents
- Obsessive Compulsive or similar behavior (repeated handwashing, looking for "stolen" articles or money, looking for a deceased spouse)

Recommendations to screen for and cope with antecedents of behavior

- Train and re-train staff to watch for subtle clues and behavior changes and to learn and apply understanding
- Encourage staff and family members to communicate early and often if there are changes to residents' behavior
- Institute and/or review current behavioral health and related policies to ensure that they reflect current resources and techniques
- Assess and re-assess residents at regular intervals: Suggest 48 hours, 7 days and 1 month after admission in conjunction with the primary care provider
- Ensure clear hand-off communication between shifts
- Carefully observe residents who have been out of the facility or have been discharged and re-admitted. Many factors can trigger changes, such as new medications, or new illnesses/injuries.
- Foster open, empathetic communication with regular team-building huddles where employees feel free to honestly share their safety concerns for each other and for residents
- Include staff and family members for safety solutions
- Conduct regular drills and training with a specific focus on real-time, bedside interventions to diffuse adverse behavior
- Monitor and collect data to track antecedent expressions and behaviors
- Screen regularly to ensure that any triggers and/or antecedent actions are addressed prior to physical interaction

We at Gallagher are committed to supporting our clients with these challenges. For more information and resources, please contact Gallagher risk control or any of your service team. Ask about the Gallagher Behavior Tracking Tool, the Bedside Behavior Assessment and Response Guide and other resources.



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