

Long-Term Care Survey Alert

Federal Developments: GAO URGES STRICTER REPORTING FOR RESIDENT ABUSE

Nursing home providers should get ready to face tougher reporting requirements for incidents involving physical or sexual abuse of residents, based on the findings of a March **General Accounting Office** report.

Titled "Nursing Homes: More Can Be Done to Protect Residents from Abuse," the report is based on 158 abuse cases in Georgia, Illinois and Pennsylvania.

The researchers concluded that crimes that occur in nursing homes are less likely to be reported and, if reported, are punished less severely than similar crimes committed outside of nursing homes.

To correct the problem, the GAO offered the following recommendations:

Ensure that state survey agencies immediately notify local law enforcement agencies or Medicaid Fraud Control Units when nursing homes report allegations of resident physical or sexual abuse or when the survey agency has confirmed complaints of alleged abuse.

Accelerate the **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services** education campaign on reporting nursing home abuse by distributing its new poster with clearly displayed complaint telephone numbers and requiring state survey agencies to ensure that these numbers are prominently listed in local telephone directories. CMS said it plans to release the poster within the next few months.

Assess state policies and practices for complying with the federal requirement to prohibit employment of individuals convicted of abusing nursing home residents and, if necessary, develop more specific guidance to ensure compliance.

Clarify the definition of abuse and otherwise ensure that states apply the definition consistently and appropriately.

Shorten the state agencies time frames for determining whether to include findings of abuse in nurse aide registry files.

The GAO report is available online at www.gao.gov/new.items/d02312.pdf.