

## MDS Alert

### Resident Safety: Disappearing Act: Heed 7 Risk Factors For Elopement

Plus: Determine behavior and travel patterns to weigh elopement potential.

Resident wandering is one problem, but elopement is one of the most serious, liability-causing issues your facility can face. And knowing which residents are most at risk for elopement is the key to preventing a potentially serious incident.

The **North American Nursing Diagnosis Association (NANDA)** defines wandering as "meandering, aimless, or repetitive locomotion that exposes the individual to harm; frequently incongruent with boundaries, limits, or obstacles." But NANDA defines elopement as "the act of leaving a safe area unsupervised and unnoticed and entering into harm's way."

The **National Institute for Elopement Prevention and Resolution** has its own, more detailed, definition of elopement: "when a patient or resident who is cognitively, physically, mentally, emotionally, and/or chemically impaired; wanders away, walks away, runs away, escapes, or otherwise leaves a caregiving facility or environment unsupervised, unnoticed, and/or prior to their scheduled discharge."

"Elopers are differentiated from wanderers by their purposeful, overt, and often repeated attempts to leave the facility and premises," states **Wroten & Associates Attorneys at Law** in Irvine, CA. "About 80 percent of elopement cases and associated accidents occur within the first 48 hours of nursing home admission."

#### Rate These Areas to Gauge Elopement Risk

You should perform an elopement risk assessment upon admission and at least quarterly thereafter, according to Albuquerque, NM-based **Pendulum, LLC's** Guidelines for Best Practices □ Elopement Prevention. You can determine a resident's elopement risk by examining seven key areas:

- 1) Mobility:** a) Needs total assistance; b) Propels self/some assistance; c) Fully ambulatory.
- 2) Mental Stability:** a) Alert, oriented; b) Disoriented/no wandering; c) Wanders aimlessly.
- 3) Emotional Status:** a) Happy with placement; b) Content with placement; c) Voices desire to leave.
- 4) History of Elopement Attempts:** a) No attempt; b) Voices, but no action; c) Has made one or more attempts.
- 5) Behavior Modification:** a) No behaviors noted; b) Behavior redirected; c) Difficult to redirect.
- 6) Medications (antipsychotic, mood altering):** a) None of these; b) One of these meds; c) Two or more of these meds.
- 7) Diseases (dementia, any type of mental illness):** a) None present; b) One present; c) Two or more present.

#### Classify Wandering by Travel Pattern & Behavior Type

Further, you can gauge a wandering resident's risk for elopement by taking a closer look at his specific behaviors.

**Strategy:** You can use wandering residents' "travel patterns" to determine cognitive status. A resident who has more efficient, direct travel patterns is likely to have less cognitive impairment, while increasingly random travel patterns suggests a decline in cognitive function, according to **ECRIInstitute**. Does the resident exhibit:

**Direct travel** from point A to point B without diversion?

**Random travel** to many locations within an area that appears indiscriminate, with no obvious end point?

**Pacing** back and forth in a limited area?

**Lapping** around in a repetitive, circular fashion?

Likewise, the types of behavior related to wandering can give insight into your resident's cognitive status and risk for elopement. ECRI lists the following wandering-related behaviors:

**Overt goal-directed or searching behavior** displayed by a resident seeking something that may be unattainable.

**Overt goal-directed or industrious behavior** that involves a tireless aim to perform certain tasks or to keep busy.

**Apparent non-goal-directed behavior** that seems aimless and continuous.

#### **Take Action Based on Elopement Risk Level**

Based on your evaluation of the resident's seven risk-factor areas, combined with your assessment of his travel patterns and types of behavior (if a wanderer), you can rank the resident's risk for elopement. Rating this risk will help you to determine what preventive and protective measures to take in care planning.» » » » » » » »

According to Pendulum, here are the elopement risk categories you can use, along with action points for each risk level:

#### **Low Elopement Risk:**

- o Monitor resident's whereabouts to assure he remains in the facility;
- o Ensure that the resident or responsible party signs out when leaving and notes an expected time to return; and
- o Listen to the resident if he voices a desire to leave (if resident becomes more persistent, increase the elopement risk level).

#### **Moderate Risk (Elopement Watch):**

- o Place resident on a wander system to alert staff (if no system exists, place on a check every half hour);
- o Ensure that the resident's activities are in full view of staff at all times (adjust activities if necessary to include the resident and maintain his interest); and
- o Document the resident's status every shift.

#### **High Risk (Elopement Warning):**

- o Provide one-to-one supervision for 24 hours and until a determination that the resident is no longer a flight risk; and
- o Notify the physician for evaluation.