Top 10 Assisted Living Facility Violations and How to Avoid Them
1. **Staff Training**

**Problem:**

Many assume that the personnel of ALFs are all properly trained but that’s not always the case. It’s common for ALFs not to require their staff have any type of formal professional training. This means that most ALFs will provide their own training as a way to save money when paying staff. ALFs are very busy and they may not realize when their staff needs to be re-trained or if they finished their training at all. Gaps in education are detrimental to the well-being of the residents in the facility.

**Solution:**

If ALFs cannot afford to hire professionals, such as certified nursing assistants, they must make sure they train their staff properly. They should keep track of the items that need to be covered, the progress each person has made, and when training needs to take place again to ensure that nothing slips through the cracks.
2. Lacking Staff-to-Resident Ratio

Problem:
Ideally, each resident would have their own staff member to look after their needs. In reality, ALFs hire a minimal staff as needed in order to ensure operability and profits, as ALFs are businesses. On average, ALFs have a staff to resident ratio between 1:10 and 1:20 during the day. This number worsens at night to a ratio between 1:20 and 1:40. With so many residents assigned to one staff member at any one time, the resident’s quality of life declines. An insufficient number of staff leads to mistakes or neglect.

Solution:
ALFs must either hire more staff to create a comfortable care ratio or reduce the number of residents they accept. To continue with low staff to resident ratios will lead to serious problems down the road.

3. Employee Health

Problem:
We all know that workplace culture is that employees are expected to come in to work unless they’re extremely sick or dying. However, ALFs need to be aware that some of their residents have weakened immune systems. Staff that come in sick or are not vaccinated are a danger to the entire facility. This continued practice can lead to a domino effect of illnesses amongst residents and cause dangerous complications long term and even deaths.

Solution:
ALFs need to keep on top of the health of their staff and make it very clear that staff should not come in when ill and ensure that their vaccinations are current.
4. Administration of Medication

Problem:

A very common mistake that facilities make is failing to dispose of expired medication. This is usually due to a lack of organization and training. We may have mistakenly taken expired medication at one time or another at home to alleviate a headache. For residents in ALFs, expired medication is much more serious. Obviously, the medications residents take are for serious ailments. Taking substandard medication does not properly treat their symptoms/illnesses.

Solution:

If ALFs keep an up-to-date document with the medications and relevant information, rather than relying on each staff member looking at the bottles, the percentage of expired medication given to residents would decrease significantly.

5. Resident Admission and Assessment

Problem:

If a potential resident can afford the price and has some semblance of independence (i.e. doesn’t belong in a nursing home), there is a good chance that ALFs will admit them. It’s common to see ALFs not properly vetting residents, from checking TB tests to ensuring they can handle the potential resident’s unique care, before admittance. Once in an ALF, resident conditions and needs may change. If staff aren’t paying attention, care plans will not be adjusted accordingly. This can lead to illness amongst the residents and a general lack of well-being.

Solution:

ALFs with a thorough checklist of resident qualifications for admittance and periodic assessments to record any changes after that time will create a stable environment for the residents where their quality of care is guaranteed.
6. Food Quality

Problem:

ALFs serve food to their residents so in that respect, they are no different than a restaurant and must adhere to those same guidelines. However, ALFs are not restaurants and may not be as careful in their habits. Usually, the problem stems from preparing food stored at the improper temperature or a general lack of tidiness or personal hygiene.

Solution:

ALFs need to think of themselves as reputable food service facilities. If they hold themselves to the high standards and look into the expectations of food prep/quality in a quality restaurant, there is no reason for this to be a continued violation.

7. Emergency Plans

Problem:

Each state has its own unique set of common natural disasters for the area. California has earthquakes, Florida has hurricanes, Kansas has tornadoes. ALFs are notoriously lax about having emergency plans in place. The “it’s not going to happen to us” mentality is common and dangerous. This does not only apply to natural disasters but to fires or power outages. A disaster or crisis could happen to anyone, at any time. A few years ago, the New York Times reported that out of 24 facilities interviewed, none had participated in emergency drills or included measures ensuring clean water for residents and staff in case of emergency.

Solution:

ALFs need to be thorough with their emergency preparedness. A little bit of research goes a long way to creating a plan that will ensure survival for residents and staff.
8. Daily Resident Care

Problem:

Working in an ALF can be overwhelming. There’s a lot to get done for a lot of people. If staff get too comfortable with the status quo of not having much oversight, there is the chance they will lapse in the residents’ daily routines or forget a step along the way. A lapse in daily care and wellness for a resident will have lasting consequences. It can lead to poor hygiene or mental health, snowballing into larger issues down the line.

Solution:

A checks and balance system where staff members rotate checking on different residents throughout the day ensures that no one person is tasked with a resident’s care, but a checklist has all the necessary information instead. This ensures that where one caretaker may have fallen short, another is there to ensure care.

9. Physical and Mental Abuse and Assault

Problem:

Unfortunately, stories of assault and abuse in ALFs is fairly common. Residents expect to be safe within the confines of their own living community and for their caretakers to be the ones keeping them safe. As of last year, more than 16,000 complaints of sexual abuse have been reported in nursing homes and ALFs since 2000. This doesn’t take into account the reports that may have been dismissed by ALF staff due to the resident’s cognitive state. While it would be easy to say that the problem would be non-existent if ALFs conducted more thorough background checks, that isn’t necessarily true.

Solution:

ALFs can protect residents from abuse by putting a protocol into effect that would preserve evidence, investigate, and report all allegations no matter what they think of a resident’s mental state.
10. Improper Storage of Hazardous Materials

Problem:

The storing of hazardous materials in an ALF should be taken seriously. It's very easy for ALFs to leave hazardous materials where they shouldn't be, like on a cart in the middle of a hallway or an easily accessible shelf. It only takes a few seconds for a resident to accidentally knock something over, or grab something they shouldn't have, and create a safety hazard.

Solution:

It takes minimal effort to properly store hazardous materials. All a facility would have to do is clean out an occupied closet and invest in a lock. It may seem ridiculous that this can constitute a violation at all, but this is universal for most businesses across different industries. Hazardous materials should only be accessible to those trained or allowed to use them.
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