

Sexual Abuse in Nursing Homes - Joint Statement from CV, NCEA, and NOVA

February 24, 2017

Wednesday's report by CNN, *Sick, Dying and Raped in America's Nursing Homes*[\[1\]](#) is a shocking reminder that abuse, including sexual abuse, of nursing home residents continues to be a very real problem. Residents and families need to have confidence that when they turn to a long-term care facility, that every possible step will be taken to protect them from such horrific acts.

Too often, frail, vulnerable residents, including those living with dementia, are targeted by abusers who use fear and intimidation, or even a resident's cognitive impairments to try to avoid prosecution[\[2\]](#).

Federal regulations[\[3\]](#) state that all residents have the right to be free from abuse. Additionally, nursing homes must ensure that they have written policies and procedures to prevent abuse, to investigate any allegations, and to ensure that any allegations of abuse are reported immediately to the appropriate agencies.

What are signs that a nursing home resident is being sexually abused?

Physical indicators of sexual abuse include[\[4\]](#):

- Bruises around inner thighs, the genital area or breasts
- Unexplained genital infections or venereal disease
- Unexplained vaginal or anal bleeding, pain or irritation
- New difficulty sitting or walking
- Torn, stained or bloodied underclothing
- An elder's report of being sexually assaulted or raped

Social indicators of sexual abuse include[\[5\]](#):

- Extreme agitation
- Withdrawal from social interactions
- Panic attacks or emerging post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms
- Suicide attempts
- Unusual behavior between the victim and the elder sexual abuse suspect

Victims of dementia will exhibit anxiety or excessive fear around the person providing or tending to their care. They may also engage in more aggressive behaviors.[\[6\]](#)

Getting Help

Once a person has suspicions of, or has identified, that a resident is being sexually abused, get help immediately.

Call:

- 911 or the local police
- State Licensing and Certification Agency. This is the agency that inspects nursing homes and investigates complaints.
- Adult Protective Services (APS). In some states, APS investigates reported suspicions about abuse of nursing home residents.

- The Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program. The local long-term care ombudsman is an advocate for nursing home residents and can assist the resident in getting the help needed.
- Report the abuse to the nursing home administrator.

Contact information for the Long-Term Care Ombudsman, Adult Protective Services, or the State Survey and Certification Agency can be found at www.theconsumervoic.org.

For more information, go to:

National Center on Elder Abuse – <https://ncea.acl.gov/>

National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care – www.theconsumervoic.org

National Long-Term Care Ombudsman Resource Center – www.ltcombudsman.org

National Organization for Victim Assistance – <http://www.trynova.org/>

[1] See “Sick, Dying and Raped in America’s Nursing Homes”
at <http://www.cnn.com/interactive/2017/02/health/nursing-home-sex-abuse-investigation/>.

[2] See “Challenges When Investigating Elder Sexual Abuse”

at http://www.ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/H_07%20Sexual%20Assault.pdf.

[3] 42 CFR 483.12(c)

[4] See “Elder Sexual Abuse”

at <http://nursinghomeabuseguide.com/elder-abuse/sexual-abuse/>.

[5] See “Elder Sexual Abuse”

at <http://nursinghomeabuseguide.com/elder-abuse/sexual-abuse/>.

[6] See “Abuse” at <https://www.alz.org/care/alzheimers-dementia-elder-abuse.asp>.