



Bursack: How to report abuse or neglect in a nursing home or assisted living facility

Carol Bradley Bursack shares steps caregivers can take to have issues addressed.



By Carol Bradley Bursack

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Dear Carol: My head is pounding from stress after leaving my mom, who lives in a skilled nursing facility. Anger isn't my norm, but I've exhausted every civil way of communicating with them. Leaving a 90-year-old woman with dementia and assorted physical challenges lying in a soaked incontinence pad on top of soiled sheets for hours crosses the line. This happens routinely. For instance, this morning, after mentioning Mom's condition to an aide, she accompanied me to Mom's room, where she sullenly changed Mom's brief. Then she none-too-gently plopped Mom in a chair, stripped the bed and said she'd be right back. We waited a half hour before I tracked down a different aide in the hall who said she'd send someone. Eventually, the bed got made, and Mom was settled again. I get that short staffing is an issue, but Mom was in pain and confused and needed to rest. In my opinion, this is neglect. Who should I speak with to get some action? - NK

Dear NK: I'm so sorry this is happening to your mom, and by extension, you. Yes, this is neglect. It doesn't help that the aide's attitude was sullen and disrespectful. I'm one of the first to remind caregivers who rightly want the best care for the person they've entrusted to a facility that they can't expect one-on-one care, so they must be reasonable. It sounds as if you've been more than reasonable; you've been patient and understanding. You've tried to treat the staff respectfully, yet the issue, which is truly unacceptable, is not being addressed.

There are steps you can take. Sadly, you might not see a quick change in this neglectful attitude, but hopefully, taking official action should eventually improve your mom's care. You mentioned that you've spoken with the floor nurse, so next, try the social worker or even go straight to the home's administrators. Let them know you're willing to escalate your complaint to the ownership.

Every state has an ombudsman who is there to investigate complaints. You can learn more at the [National Long-Term Care Ombudsman Resource Center](#) . To find the ombudsman in your state, go to the [Eldercare Locator](#) (<https://eldercare.acl.gov>) and type in the zip code of the facility. You should see a link for the ombudsman program. If not, go to <https://theconsumervoice.org/get-help>.

If you see no improvement, file a complaint with your state through its Department of Health. Put your concerns in writing. Emphasize that you're aware of staffing issues and have tried to be patient, but this is

neglect. *Be sure to use the word neglect.* State that this is not acceptable, so you are forced to take further action.

Unfortunately, a perfect resolution is unlikely, but you can hope for improvement. Some families hire private aides for one-on-one care, but considering the cost of facility care, that shouldn't be required. Not to mention the added expense is beyond what more people can afford.

My heart is with you, NK. This is an agonizing situation that no one should face.

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