

Trust, But Verify Elder Care Workers **by Chief Dan Flynn**

There comes a time in the life of an elderly person when the mental or physical conditions of advancing age require them to seek assistance with performing the normal tasks of daily life such as personal hygiene, cooking, cleaning, taking medications, and physical therapy, etc. In order to find assistance, those with sufficient means often turn to companies or even faith-based groups that provide various kinds of in-home elder care workers. Once arrangements are made, individual care-giver(s) are assigned, and normally the elderly person develops a trusting relationship and companionship with their personal care-giver. Before long, the elder care worker is granted varying degrees of access and daily control over the elderly person's finances, medications, valuables and even communication with the world outside their home.

Knowing that once they are hired elder-care workers will function in positions of trust, most companies that employ them strive to screen their employees to ensure they do not have histories of theft, or histories of abusing those in their care. Reputable companies know that the best predictor of future behavior for any employee is past behavior, and once they place a worker in an elderly person's home, it is difficult to monitor their integrity. While the employer faces a high level of liability if their employees are dishonest, abusive, or in extreme cases bilk clients out of their life savings; by the time the misconduct is exposed it is too late to undo the damage. Thus, it is essential to prevent elder care worker misconduct by carefully and thoroughly checking their background before hiring them.

So how can assisted living care employers examine the history of an elder care worker applicant? Normally, the employer performs a process known as "due diligence" by checking the candidates's criminal history (if any), verifying their status with prior employers, and checking their references. More diligent employers also use cyber-vetting to ascertain the applicant's internet presence and/or any past negative articles in the news media. Nevertheless, it is easy for job applicants to conceal bad histories of theft, abuse, and professional misconduct, especially if it was not reported to the police or other government agency. For the job-seeking elder care worker, it can be as simple as failing to mention a previous employer with whom there has been a problem.

Many states maintain registries of elder care workers and the registries also list those who have had sustained findings of elder abuse or neglect from social service agencies, elder services regulatory agencies or from the criminal justice system. Elder care companies can consult the registry before hiring the worker and the public can check it as well. Yet if the worker has been the subject of elder abuse-related infractions in other states and they conceal it, it is difficult for the prospective employer to learn about it.

Given the potential of unknowingly hiring an elder care worker with a hidden history of abusing those in their charge, the best advice for an elderly person or anyone representing an elderly person, is to take care to ensure the workers have been well checked out beforehand. Before allowing a worker to have access to an elderly person's checking account, credit cards, medications, personal valuables and so forth, make sure the integrity of the proposed worker(s) has been thoroughly examined by their employer. Insist that the worker has been checked for criminal history, employment history and medical history and that they have successfully completed a pre-employment drug screen and polygraph (lie detector). In addition, it is advisable to be sure the workers' complete internet presence (cyber-vetting) has been reviewed, and that they do not appear on a state sex offender registry.

In the final analysis, most elder care workers are professional, dedicated, trustworthy individuals and the companies that employ them are very careful about those they employ. Yet, elder care workers are often placed in charge of the worldly goods and assets of vulnerable elderly people who sometimes suffer from deteriorating mental faculties. Therefore, it is vitally important to thoroughly check out the workers' background before giving them that access. Remember, the very best predictor of future behavior is past behavior.