



# STATE OF NEW YORK DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

161 Delaware Avenue

Delmar, New York 12054

Richard F. Daines  
Commissioner

May 1, 2007

DQS/DAL: #07-04  
Unsafe Wandering – High Risk Season

Dear Administrator:

This letter is to notify you that we are entering a season in which the risk of unsafe wandering behavior increases, and to ask that your leadership and staff be especially diligent in preventing such behavior.

As you know, the Department of Health has actively worked with the provider community to raise awareness of the causes of unsafe resident wandering, and provide guidance to providers to support the implementation of effective wandering behavior management programs.

Recent years' data demonstrate that Spring is a high-risk season in which the volume of unsafe behaviors, including elopement from the nursing facility, increase.

As we enter a high-risk season, please review your facility's wandering behavior management program. The program should promote wandering that can be therapeutic and helpful to the resident's health status and quality of life. It should also have in place mechanisms that can reduce the risk of unsafe behaviors and the adverse outcomes that can result from such behavior.

Please familiarize yourself and your staff with the Guidance Document and Dear Administrator Letter distributed on May 16, 2005 and to re-examine your systems to ensure that adequate safeguards are in place.

Please give particular attention to the following:

- The desire of residents to want to spend time outside.
- The existence of lifelong patterns for some residents where they may have been more active in nicer weather or pursued particular activities outside.
- Changes in resident health or mental status. Please ensure that residents are reassessed for risk of unsafe wandering behavior when any significant change in status occurs, and modify the resident's care plan accordingly.

- Staff changes brought about by vacations that result in the assignment of staff who may not be fully familiar with all residents and their specific needs.
- Increased number of visitors to facilities during vacations that may be unfamiliar with facility procedures/operations and residents. Staff who monitor building egress locations should be especially vigilant during times of the day when visitor traffic is high.
- Any weather related conditions that might potentially impact alarms or other environmental features of the facility.
- Functionality of door and wander alert alarms. Please ensure that all alarms are functioning, and that they are tested frequently.

Please ensure that **ALL** staff are aware of your systems, policies and procedures for identifying, managing, preventing and responding to unsafe behaviors. This letter should be posted at all nursing stations, staff rooms and security areas. If you have any additional questions, please contact my office at 518-408-1267.

It is important that your facility remain vigilant to prevent unsafe events. Together, we have achieved significant progress in the effectiveness of managing residents with wandering behaviors. I am confident that your continued efforts will provide our residents with a safe environment in which they can enjoy a meaningful and satisfying quality of life.

Sincerely,



Keith W. Servis, Director  
Division of Quality & Surveillance  
For Nursing Homes & ICFs/MR