

**ncal** **National Center for Assisted Living**  
Your National Assisted Living Leader for Advocacy, Knowledge, Education  
and Professional Development


## Resident Transitions in Assisted Living

### Statistics

70 percent of the people moving into an ALF  
said the decision to relocate was made with the  
help of someone else.

- 90.5 percent family
- 17.7 percent physician

(Gabrel & Jones 2000; Hawes, Phillips, & Rose, 2000)



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## Transition

- “Passage from one place to another”
- We all experience transitions throughout our lives. The difference between you and I transitioning from one place to another varies based on coping abilities, life experiences, cognitive abilities, emotional status, and support systems. The same is true for residents.



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## About the Focus Groups

- NCAL's Consumer Relations committee members and other NCAL Leaders held focus groups across the nation to hear first hand what fears, worries, and questions new residents may have when moving into assisted living.
- This is what they said....



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## Resident Feelings

It is normal for the residents to feel:

- Angry
- Fearful
- Frustrated
- Hurt
- Sad
- Insecure



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## Common New Resident Questions

- What furniture can I bring?
- Who will give me my medicine?
- Will “they” tell me what to do?
- How will I get to the dining room?
- Will they have food like I cook at home?
- Who will I sit with?
- Is my family going to leave me?



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## Fear of Losing Independence is the #1 Concern

- Have new residents make as many decisions as possible.
- Involve the new resident as much as possible in the pre-admission decision making process.
- This fear of losing independence is magnified for residents who were not directly involved in choosing the facility. This increases the transition challenges.



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## Fear of Losing Privacy

- Provide each resident with their own key
- Train staff to knock when entering a new resident's, or any resident's, apartment. Train them to wait for an answer!
- Provide each resident with their own mailbox if possible to ensure privacy with their correspondence



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## Fear of Losing Control

- Respite care is also a good way to incorporate control. Offer a prospective resident take a trial run with the facility to see if it matches his/her needs and wants.
- Involving the residents in other decisions (e.g., what possessions, clothing, etc. to bring) may ease the fear of having no control. If the resident needs personal care assistance, have staff meet with the resident and coordinate the service times with the new resident.



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## Food is Another Major Concern

- Concern about whether they will have choices and meal time choices
- Concern they won't like the food
- Concern about where they will sit in the dining room
- Concern about coming to the dining room, especially at first



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## How to Address New Resident Fears



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### Addressing Their Concerns: Your New Resident Materials

- Aids the new resident and their family members
- Give to the resident and family members *prior* to the move so that they may review.
- Have it available in large print and other languages if needed.



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## New Resident Materials Content

### Some suggestions for content include:

- Current weekly menus and meal times
- Map of the facility
- Resident list
- Pre-move in checklist of what to bring and not to bring
- Current activity schedule
- Staff roster
- Staff phone list



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## Content cont.

- Visitation policy
- Security policy
- Fire drills & emergency evacuations
- Floor plans of the apartments
- Map of the local community
- Beauty shop schedule and fees
- Complaint information
- Phone number of Ombudsman



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## Ways for Social Workers to Support Residents and Families

- Liaison between the resident, family, and administrator/director
- Provides counseling and other psychotherapeutic services
- Works with staff to facilitate residents' adjustment
- Assists in the development of service plans



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## Covering Social Work Costs

- If your facility does not have a social work services, they may be available at little cost through a community-based social service agency.
- Some services may be covered through Medicare or other third-party payers.
- [www.helpstartshere.org](http://www.helpstartshere.org)



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## Peer Assistance & Buddy Systems

- Another avenue to help with the emotions of moving in is for the resident to talk with other residents so that they may share their coping strategies.
- Use the buddy system. Ask a long term resident to be the new resident's buddy for the first few weeks to help guide them through the transition.



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## Remember: Isolation Extends the Transition Period

- New residents stay in their rooms. While it is quite natural to be shy and withdrawn in a new environment, residents say that isolation makes the transition period longer and more difficult.
- Have your activities director meet with the new resident to review the time and types of activities and extend a personal invitation to the new resident to attend.



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## Remember: Isolation Extends the Transition Period

- Ask the new resident's buddy to accompany him/her to different activities and introduce him/her to the others.
- Have either the resident's buddy or a staff member escort the resident to all meals for the first few days.
- Have all staff gently encourage new residents to come out of their rooms and be sure to make them feel welcome when they do participate.



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## Recommendation

**"By better understanding the experience, gerontological nurses and assisted living administrators can take active roles in facilitating the transition of elderly individuals into assisted living facilities and making the facility feel like home."**

(Moving to an Assisted Living Facility: Exploring the Transitional Experience of Elderly Individuals, Janet P. Tracy, PhD, RN and Sandra DeYoung, EdD, RN, Journal of Gerontological Nursing, October, 2004)



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## Transitioning into Assisted Living

- Use NCAL's Brochure in our "Here's Help" series (hard copy or [www.ncal.org](http://www.ncal.org)) to educate consumers and set expectations
- Use NCAL's "members only" in-service training tool to teach your staff about residents moving in
- Purpose: To ease the transition for new residents by listening to advice from residents who currently live in assisted living facilities across the nation





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## *Moving Into an Assisted Living Residence: Making A Successful Transition*

- This guide helps residents about to transition into an assisted living community. It covers:
  - Privacy Concerns
  - What to Bring to Your New Home
  - Moving Day Helpers
  - Making the Emotional Transition
  - Advice for Residents and their Families
  - Suggested Do's and Don'ts




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**National Center for Assisted Living**  
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*Improving Resident Satisfaction:*  
***Turning Complaints Into  
Compliments***



*Developing An Effective Complaint and Grievance  
Process for Long Term Care Facilities*



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**Effective Complaint Handling  
Can Help Facilities Excel**

- A structured complaint and grievance policy is consistent with a resident-centered philosophy.
- It's what America's most revered and successful service providers do well.
- Can help reduce your risks.
- Can enhance your delivery of person-centered care.



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## Market Driven vs. Self-Centered Organizations

### Market Driven

- All decisions start with the customer
- Quality is defined by customers
- Employees are customer advocates
- Best ideas come from customers

### Self-Centered

- We sell to whomever will buy
- Quality = conformity to internal standards
- Customer relations are problems for mktg.
- Customers don't know what they want



Source: The Market Driven Organization

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## Market Driven vs. Self-Centered Organizations

### Market Driven

- Customer Loyalty is key to profitability
- Learn from mistakes
- We know more than the competition

### Self-Centered

- New customers are what matters
- Avoid mistakes
- If the competition does it, it must be good



Source: The Market Driven Organization

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## Beyond Customer Satisfaction

- **Effective complaint management helps identify what makes customers unhappy, which can improve:**
  - Customer loyalty
  - Resident retention
  - Risk management
  - Goodwill
  - Living and working environments



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## Understanding Complaints

- **Complaints are a normal part of every service business.**
- **Complaints can be routine, serious, or somewhere in between.**
  - Dining services, cleanliness, policies, activities, missing clothes, billing issues, and more
  - Theft of resident property or alleged mistreatment, abuse, or neglect of residents



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## Understanding the Root Cause of a Complaint

- Personal preference
- Service shortfall
- Ineffective procedure
- Poor practice that becomes customary practice
- Poor or ineffective policies
- Crime



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## Understanding Complainers: Some Tell Everyone

- Dissatisfied customers (and their family members) tell an average 15 other people about a negative experience.
- Others will complain to everyone but you.
- These conversations can seriously affect your facility's reputation and the ability to attract new residents.



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## Understanding Complainers: Some Tell Nobody

- As many as 33 percent of people won't pursue a complaint that is serious enough for them to remember a year later.
- Why the silence?
  - Fear of retaliation by staff
  - Fear of being asked to move out
  - Fear that rates will be raised
  - Human nature



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## Understanding Complainers: Some Never Stop ...

- Constant complainers take patience and understanding, including understanding their motivations.
- Don't become immune to constant complainers as important changes or issues might be missed.
- Remember that aggressive complainers often need a timeframe for resolution.



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## Effective Complaint Management

- Has a clearly defined process through which residents and families can register their concerns.
- Addresses concerns sincerely and promptly, regardless of the type of complaint.



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## Is The Customer Always Right?

- People will answer this question differently.
- Regardless, staff should respect the resident/family member's opinion.



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## Change Your Complaint Culture: Encourage Complaints

- Get rid of the blame game.
- Don't automatically reward staff for reducing the number of complaints.
- Be a role model for your staff; keep in mind that deeds mean more than words.
- Encourage staff to ask residents/families "What can we do better?"
- Behavioral change brings culture change.



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## Management Principles for Changing Culture

- Demonstrate leadership commitment
- Understand the need for change
- Mobilize commitment
- Shape the vision
- Align your structure, systems and incentives
- Sustain the change



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## Complaints Are An Opportunity

- An effective complaint process treats resident or family member complaints as opportunities for improvement.
- Effective complaint management is essential for continuous quality improvement.



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## How to Encourage Complaints

- Promote organizational caring and empathy.
- Encourage honest feedback and demonstrate that you can handle criticism.
- Customer must perceive easy and welcome access to management.
- Provide and market multiple complaint channels (phone, e-mail, comment cards, meetings.)



Source: Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food

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## How to Encourage Complaints

- **Help staff encourage complaints. Train them to:**
  - Observe
  - Actively listen
  - Problem solve
- **Enable and encourage frontline staff to solve problems. They are the backbone of your business.**
- **Make it worthwhile for customers to complain. Resolve the complaint and notify the customer.**



Source: Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food

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## Key Factors For Success

- **The process must clearly outline:**
  - how to complain
  - where to complain, and
  - how seriously it will be handled.
- **The process must be visible, accessible, and fair.**
- **Regularly communicate the process to residents, families, employees, and other stakeholders.**



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## Key Factors For Success, *cont.*

- Information reported by residents, family members, and employees should be recorded, reviewed, and responded to in a timely and confidential manner.
- Have a process for assisting residents who need help preparing a written complaint.
- Include the address and toll-free numbers of the ombudsman and the state agency for reporting unresolved issues and concerns.



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## A Model Process

- **Step 1: Encourage Residents/Family Members To Share Concerns**
  - Ensure that all facility staff and management encourage residents and family members to share their concerns/complaints.
  - Address complaints quickly so that they don't balloon into unwanted calls from an attorney, family physician, family member, or an ombudsman.
  - Know that the attentiveness and empathy of the staff member recording the concern will play an important role in whether the concern is successfully resolved.



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## A Model Process, *cont.*

- **Step 2: Apologize and Take Information At Initial Contact**

- Employees should apologize for the discomfort or inconvenience caused by the incident. An apology does not mean an acceptance of blame. Rather, it is a way to show the resident or family that the staff recognizes their concern and distress.
- If the employee can competently address and resolve the complaint at the time it is made, he or she should do so, preferably in the resident/family member's presence.



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## A Model Process, *cont.*

- **Step 2, *cont.***

- If, after the employee takes action, the resident/family member continues to complain or indicates that the problem is ongoing, the employee should initiate the facility's complaint procedure.
- If unable to resolve the problem, the employee should personally take the resident/family member to the staff member who can address the concern.
- All staff members should have the names and positions of people to whom they can take both resident and family concerns.



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## A Model Process, *cont.*

- **Step 3: Document The Problem**

- All complaints should be systematically documented on a standard form.
- Blank forms should be readily available to residents and family members, e.g, the resident handbook, with the receptionist, centrally located each floor, near the dining room, or other areas where residents gather.



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## A Model Process, *cont.*

- **Step 3, *cont.***

- Communication books are another way to document complaints.
- Managers can use communication books to look for patterns in complaints and see if policy or resident service plan changes are needed.
- They can also serve as resource between shifts.



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## A Model Process, *cont.*

- **Step 3, *cont.***

- Verbal resolutions should be documented.
- Create a complaint records retention policy.
- Complaint records should be kept for quality assurance purposes only and not as part of the resident's chart/record.



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## A Model Process, *cont.*

- **Step 4: Designate A Staff Contact**

- Designate a single staff person as the family's contact during the resolution process; introduce this staff person to the family.
- For more serious concerns, a letter should also be sent to the family to acknowledge the facility's receipt of the complaint.



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## A Model Process, *cont.*

### • Step 5: Gather The Facts

- Initiate an interview process to fully understand the scope of the problem. Listen to all parties involved.
- These fact-gathering sessions are not inquisitions, but should uncover the root issues that led to the complaint.
- For complaints that deal directly with a policy (such as meal times, service delivery, or housekeeping), gathering staff suggestions for addressing the issue helps build unity.
- For more serious issues, a more investigatory approach is necessary.



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## A Model Process, *cont.*

### • Step 6: Formulate a Solution

- At the end of the initial contact, the resident or family member should feel that something was done to resolve the issue.
- The tangible indication of a resolution can be something as simple as an alternate meal, fresh bed linens, or more detail about an action plan (e.g., a specific date on which the facility will follow up on the problem.)
- The resident or family member may also be consulted for input on the solution.



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## A Model Process, *cont.*

- **Step 6, *cont.***

- For more serious concerns such as theft or mistreatment of residents, contact the proper authorities.
- After a resolution has been determined, inform the resident/family as soon as possible. Remember that any communication (verbal or written) must respect the confidentiality of your employees.
- Your communication of the resolution can also reaffirm your commitment to resident satisfaction. If a policy has been changed, include that in the note or phone conversation.



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## A Model Process, *cont.*

- **Step 7: Follow Up**

- It is essential to follow up on every complaint after you believe it has been resolved.
- Call or visit the resident/family member to verify that the resolution was satisfactory and to inquire whether there are any other issues that need to be addressed.



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## Three Things To Do Now

- Teach staff to apologize
- Give the family something tangible
- Attach someone to the problem



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## A General Rule: Give Something Tangible

- Good for customer satisfaction
- Can bring closure to a situation
- Good risk management practice



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## Staff Training Is Key

- Use both formal training sessions and department meetings to review the policy and processes used.
- Role play.
- Hang signs in employee break rooms to remind and reinforce the facility's commitment to effective complaint resolution.



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## Get Beyond "It's Not My Job"

**"Job descriptions become irrelevant  
when guest satisfaction is at risk"**

*--The Ritz Carlton Philosophy*



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## **Involve Your Staff In Developing Resolutions**

- Complaints also offer staff a chance to contribute to the resolution. Your frontline staff may have several viable solutions based on their knowledge and experience.
- Staff-based solutions get better buy-in and help build confidence.



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## **Guide To Effective Listening**

- Listening is a large part of good customer service.
- Effective listening includes listening for not only the concern, but also for the solution that the resident or family is expecting.
- The resolution should meet that expectation.



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## Tips For Effective Listening

- Stop what you are doing and make eye contact when someone addresses you.
- Sit down with the person, if possible. The act of sitting down together feels less rushed and more personal.
- Use positive body language. Lean slightly toward the person talking and keep your hands at your side.



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## Tips For Effective Listening, cont.

- Mirror the other person's concern.
- Write the concern down, using words the resident or family member used.
- Create a climate for collaboration and negotiation.
- Agree whenever possible. Say 'yes' whenever possible.



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## Using Conflict Resolution Techniques For Difficult Situations

- Residents or family members can become agitated or angered and may create a loud, public display.
- Immediate actions on the part of staff:
  - Listen actively
  - Treat concerns as valid
  - Diffuse the situation
  - Move to a private area



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## Tips For Diffusing Difficult Situations

- If a family member's complaint indicates that a resident may be in imminent danger, go immediately to the resident to assess the situation.
- Ensure that both parties are at the same eye level, whether seated or standing.
- Let them vent! When the anger subsides, validate the concern and express gratitude for bringing the complaint to your attention.



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## Tips For Difficult Situations, *cont.*

- Begin to ask questions to better understand the complaint or concern when the resident or family member is calmer. When you feel you understand the concern, restate it for the resident or family.
- At the end of the conversation, tell the resident or family member what will be done.
- Take the time to provide additional customer service. "Will that be satisfactory?" "Is there anything else that we can do in the interim to make this situation better?"



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## Cultural and Generational Differences Make A Difference

- Facial Expressions
- Voice (tone, affect, and loudness)
- Body language
- Preferences
- Values
- Choices
- Expectations



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## The Role of Resident Councils

- Serve as an educational forum for your facility.
- Can develop agreeable compromises for some concerns.
- Enhance communications with staff.
- Identify small problems before they escalate.
- Be the only forum in which residents will voice their concerns.



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## The Role of Family Councils

- A family council is especially helpful for residents who cannot verbalize their concerns (those with dementia).
- Family councils can:
  - Enhance communications with staff.
  - Identify small problems before they escalate.
  - Be the only forum in which families are comfortable voicing concerns.

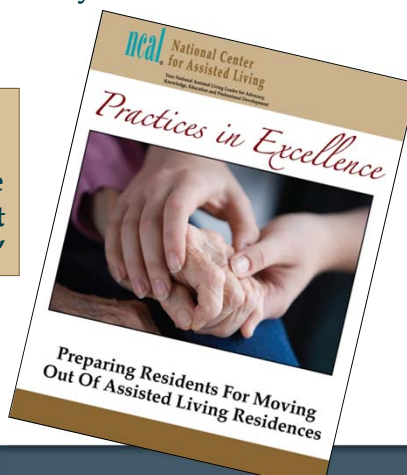


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## *Preparing Residents for Moving Out of Assisted Living Residences*

- This guide helps assisted living professionals prepare and support residents when they move out to reduce stress and anxiety.

**"ALRs should find ways to facilitate an easy transition and one that makes the resident feel special and loved."**



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## **Transitioning Out of Assisted Living**

- Educating residents and families about move outs should begin before residents move in
- Explain your move-out criteria in plain English, not medical terms such as "Stage 3 & 4 decubitus ulcer"
- Show the resident/family the move-out criteria in your contracts
- Set realistic expectations about your community's scope of care



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## Talk to Residents and Families

- Discuss what happens when a resident's resources diminish and the resident can no longer afford the assisted living community
- Provide information about any appeal rights the resident may have
- Provide contact information for your state Ombudsman to all incoming residents



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## Set Realistic Expectations for Staff

- The average age of assisted living residents is 87. The average U.S. life expectancy is 78.
- Average length of stay is 28 months.
- On average, 40% of your residents won't be at your community one year from now.
- Where did they go?
  - At least one-third have died
  - Of the remaining two-thirds, 60 percent are in a nursing home



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## Communicate Often & Document Those Conversations

- After a resident moves in, provide regular updates about a resident's health status. Increase the frequency if the resident is rapidly declining.
- Document the formal updates including any discussions about the possibility that you eventually may not be able to meet a resident's needs



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## Move-Out Notice: Be Sure to Include:

- Effective date of move-out
- Reasons for move-out, including facts supporting decision
- Resident appeal rights (how, when & where)
- LTC Ombudsman contact info.
- Resident's right to be represented by another party, including legal counsel
- Deposit/refund information
- Where the resident is moving to if known



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### As Move-Out Day Approaches...

- Inform staff, preferably in a staff meeting
- Communicate to all shifts
- Assign a back-up point person
- Reaffirm your commitment to support resident and clearly explain how the move-out process will work
- Repeat again before move-out day
- Document your conversations
- Confirm move-in date with next facility



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### As Move-Out Day Approaches...

- Make sure staff know how to respond to “I don’t want to move” comments
- Ask staff what the resident is saying about the move and respond
- Ask resident how/whether they want to notify other residents
- Help staff say good-bye
- Make sure moving responsibilities are clear
- Get all the paper work and records prepared to go with the resident



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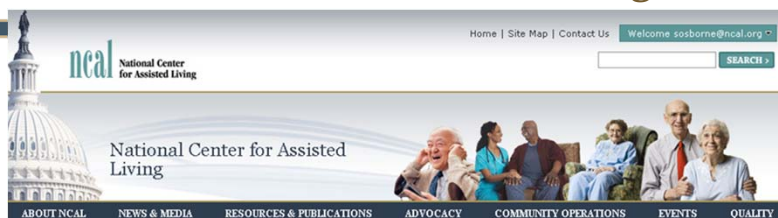
## Move-Out Day

- Ensure the resident is comfortable
- Be available to answer questions
- Deliver paperwork and records early
- Offer snacks and drinks to family movers
- Going away gift
- Have extra packing supplies available
- Walk out with residents when they leave
- Follow up to see how the move went and how the resident is doing



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## NCAL's Web site – www.ncal.org



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