



ASHA Statement to Washington Post
January 16, 2024

Your December 2023 series, “Memory Inc,” examines isolated but tragic incidents of elopement from assisted living and memory care communities over a five-year timeframe. Any case of death or injury due to human error or neglect is devastating to all who are impacted, including the resident, their family, and to the senior living community itself -- residents and staff members alike.

However, the writers inaccurately imply that these events are a common occurrence in assisted living and memory care communities. They are not. Elopements are an extremely rare occurrence considering the industry has cared for approximately six million individuals over the past five years.

The vast majority of older Americans with Alzheimer’s or related dementias residing in memory care communities are well-cared for in a safe, secure environment. Programs are designed according to specific needs, supporting a person-centered approach to care that ensures the well-being of the resident. Note that memory care (often a specific section of an assisted living community) includes design features to prevent resident elopements.

The *Washington Post* articles are missing important context related to caring for individuals with Alzheimer’s disease or related dementias and neglect to discuss the inherent dangers that exist for those with dementia being cared for informally in their traditional homes. The fact is, assisted living and memory care is a far safer option for those with this diagnosis than living at home.

The articles also inaccurately suggest that elopements in assisted living or memory care settings would never occur if there was federal oversight of assisted living. This too is incorrect as anyone who follows the nursing home industry (which is federally regulated) would surely point out.

The articles fail to provide any meaningful description of the existing and evolving state regulatory structure for assisted living in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The fact is, assisted living is highly regulated by the states which impose strict requirements beginning with licensure and cover a broad range of provisions such as apartment specifications, residency agreements, disclosure of services, costs, policies, inspection reports, core services, service planning requirements (pre- and post- admission), third party provider offerings disclosure, medication assistance services, food and dietary provisions, staffing requirements, training hours (including dementia care training), resident safety requirements and much more.

Furthermore, the states are actively involved in updating and modifying regulations and statutes on an ongoing basis. The states are far more responsive than the federal government in addressing the needs of residents and their families to ensure innovative services and programs are available to meet their needs and those of a rapidly aging population, including those with Alzheimer’s and related dementias.

The articles also fail to recognize the commitment and dedication of scores of front-line caregivers and other senior living professionals who work so hard to provide quality care and living environments for senior residents. Any news articles about the failures of a limited number of care providers must also recognize the important contributions of the vast majority of women and men who work in this profession.

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