



Letters to the Editor

May 3, 2024

Washington Post

Re: Senior homes refuse to pick up fallen residents, dial 911. `Why are they calling us?'

The May 3 article by Todd C. Frankel (Senior homes refuse to pick up fallen residents, dial 911.) fails to get to the essence of the issue – the population of the U.S. is aging dramatically; by 2040 the number of Americans aged 65 and older will double, while the number of older adults 85 years and over will quadruple. There are numerous implications related to these significant demographic changes and calls for emergency response is one such area, and almost certain to increase in the coming decades as our senior population explodes.

Importantly, fee-for-service charges for emergency service calls to assisted living or other residential care facilities when these services are made available to other multifamily households without charge, constitutes unreasonable and unlawful discrimination against disabled seniors. If the seniors residing in assisted living had remained in their single-family or multifamily residences, and did not move to assisted living, they would still require emergency services – but would not be penalized with a charge.

Further missing from the article is that a number of states in fact require assisted living residences to call 911 if a resident has fallen. In California, for example, “the licensee shall immediately telephone 9-1-1 if an injury or other circumstance has resulted in an imminent threat to a resident’s health...” These regulations are intended to ensure that a medical professional examines a resident who may have fractured a hip or suffered an injury like a subdural hematoma from the fall. Often, the assisted living resident does not have the ability to articulate whether they hit their head due to a cognitive impairment, such as Alzheimer’s or related dementia. As illustrated, the need to call 911 when a senior living resident falls is driven by resident and staff member safety and state licensure requirements.

Finally, Frankel fails to mention that many assisted living communities have specific and effective fall prevention programs to make it less likely that residents fall.

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