

Does video invade privacy or ensure protection?



Jane Glenn Haas

Our Health column

Special to the Orange County Register

jghaas@cox.net

Comments 0 | Recommend 1

Ten years have passed since gerontologist Jacqueline L. DuPont put cameras in the bedrooms of her residential care clients with Alzheimer's.

The move was controversial, to put it mildly.

The state's Community Care Licensing, which oversees residential care facilities for the elderly, fumed and held hearings.

The public nattered about what the cameras would record — people naked after a shower or having their diapers changed.

Well, for a decade, the "nanny cams" have recorded just about everything that goes on in those bedrooms, unless the lens is covered by request for an adult diaper change or other privacy issues. This seems a good time to talk over the pros and cons of the video recordings with DuPont, CEO of Assured In Home Care, DuPont Residential Homes and Irvine Cottages.

Q. Is the camera issue finally settled?

A. No, it's still a question in some minds but they are in all my homes, which are located in Irvine, Costa Mesa and Mission Viejo.

Q. What about state licensing?

A. We had to have legal representation before their internal courts. We had to go there numerous times. We had family members join us. They were all daughters. It was the daughters who cared.

Q. And the results?

A. We've never had any theft, no losses of hearing aids or dentures. The nursing home industry average is 30 to 40 percent losses.

And we've had no elder abuse. Of course, there is no way of knowing how much elder abuse actually occurs in homes, but it is a big issue.

My staff says they love the cameras, by the way, because they are protected from false accusations.

Q. Do other homes have the cameras besides yours?

A. No. There is no law that says you can or cannot have cameras. The state allowed me to have a pilot for two years and no one revisited it. The state has not promoted that I have the cameras. I don't think they want anyone to know.

Q. Do families care?

A. We have some families who moved loved ones here from Canada, Oregon and Texas just for the cameras. Their loved ones were severely abused elsewhere.

Abuse is not as common in homes as theft or residents showing impaired judgment.

Like, we had one lady who wanted to give away all her jewelry to the other residents. They were expensive things. With the cameras, we found out quickly what was going on and called her daughter to come for the jewelry.

Q. Do your residents complain about treatment?

A. No. But remember, these are people who are easily taken advantage of. They are expensive and fragile. I feel more comfortable knowing I have the capability of pulling up these images on my laptop — only administrators can log on, of course — and see how they (residents) are being treated.

Q. This must be an expensive system.

A. It requires a dedicated cable line and special adaptor. We are able to absorb the camera cost into the overall operating expenses, though, and keep our prices in the mid-range for this type of care.

Q. What got you interested in caring for the demented?

A. My grandfather had Alzheimer's and was in a good nursing home in 1989. He kept complaining all the time about nurses beating him and he had bruises. His brother was an elder law attorney and I am a gerontologist. I wished I could put him in a home with cameras to protect him. We finally moved him to another unit and he never complained again.

I'm not always sure what's delusional and what's not. But if one of my residents says 'Five men came in last night and raped me,' I can look at the camera tape. I can realize it's either something in her past or a bad dream. We can help her ignore it and redirect her thoughts.

Q. This was very controversial a decade ago.

A. Oh, yes, we were in the Wall Street Journal and on "Dateline" and "CNN." The controversy went away and we carried on, taking the best care we can of our residents.

(Reach DuPont and Irvine Cottages at 949-533-5938).

Contact the writer: jghaas@cox.net