

Elopement IJ Guidelines

State and federal regulations require long term care facilities to provide adequate supervision of residents to prevent accidents. One potential outcome of a facility's failure to provide necessary supervision of residents is resident elopement. Appendix Q of the SOM establishes guidelines for determining immediate jeopardy. Elopement due to a facility failure to supervise cognitively impaired residents is an identified IJ trigger in these guidelines. To expand on the federal guidelines in Appendix Q, the following conditions must be documented before a resident elopement is considered an IJ level deficiency or an A violation under licensure:

- **Failure of the facility staff to supervise resident(s)** - This failure to supervise may include, but is not limited to, failure to visually supervise exit doors that are not alarmed; failure to respond to alarm devices intended to notify staff when a resident leaves the building; turning off alarm devices combined with failure to visually supervise exit doors; failure to provide exit door alarms or maintain alarm devices in working condition; failure to properly investigate the sounding of an exit alarm.
- **Resident elopement from a facility unnoticed by any facility staff** - Evidence that, unknown to facility staff, a resident has eloped from the building and is outside of the facility.
- **Resident's health status is such that they have insufficient safety skills and wandering outside of the facility puts them at risk for serious injury or death** - We must have evidence that confirms that a cognitive impairment prevents a resident from recognizing environmental hazards such as extreme weather, traffic, tripping hazards, bodies of water, ditches or any other situation where a resident may be injured due to their inability to recognize the potential hazard; or a substantial physical impairment combined with environmental hazards that places the resident at risk for serious injury.
- **An imminent hazard to the resident's health and safety is identified** - Surveyors must document an imminent hazard that puts the resident at immediate risk of serious injury or death. An environmental hazard in the immediate vicinity of the eloped resident must be identified. These would include, but are not limited to, the following; high traffic roadways; bodies of water; ditches or any similar ground hazard that may cause falls; construction sites; dense woods or crops and any related environmental conditions that place the resident at great risk for injury. Other hazards that surveyors must consider include hot, cold or dangerous weather conditions; situations where the resident is away from the facility for a long period of time and has missed medications or been without food or water. If a resident sustains a serious injury during an elopement, surveyors will conclude that an imminent hazard existed.

When surveyors have evidence that these conditions are met, they are to contact their supervisor to discuss the citation of an immediate jeopardy. In making the decision to call an IJ, surveyors and supervisors may also consider the following mitigating circumstances:

- The resident has no past history of wandering/elopement behaviors combined with a short duration out of the building and the absence of any imminent environmental hazard.

- The resident expresses a clear and reasonable motive for leaving the building. In evaluating cognitive impairment, resident motive for leaving the building should be considered. If there is a clear and reasonable motive for the resident leaving the building, this may be evidence that their cognitive impairment may not be at a level which puts them in immediate jeopardy. Examples of this may include; a resident that makes a clear effort to avoid detection by staff and escapes rather than elopes; a resident that declares clear and reasonable motive for leaving, i.e. "I went to the store to buy some fruit" and resident safely proceeded towards the store.

All elopements must be evaluated on a case by case basis. All elopements do not justify the documentation of an IJ. Please keep in mind that the intent of the regulations is to assure that staff immediately responds when a resident leaves the building. A violation may not exist if staff quickly responds to a resident who has left the building and redirects them back inside.

If evidence supporting the above conditions exists and there are no extenuating circumstances that serve to reduce the risk, an IJ citation must be pursued in accordance with Appendix Q.

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