

## **Active Shooter in a Senior Care Community: Part 1 of 2**

*Can we really be prepared?*

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The image of a person with a gun and the intent to do harm to others is no longer solely the stuff of movies and TV shows. Across the United States, active shooter incidents have become all too prevalent. These incidents have occurred in schools, hospitals, shopping malls, and even senior care communities. The reality is that these active shooter events have become a daily part of our national and global culture.

It is easy to sit back and think that such an incident will never affect your senior living community or that there is not much that can be done to prepare. But the question that you should be asking yourself as an owner or manager is: "Is there anything I can do to be more prepared than we are now for such an event?"

From a litigation perspective, over time, as the active shooter phenomenon has become more prevalent, a legal standard of care for employers and owners of public places is beginning to develop. Said another way, if called upon in the aftermath of such an event, will someone be able to claim that you are partly responsible for injury or death because you failed to educate or train your employees on best practices?

When factoring an active shooter scenario to your current crisis management plan, one of the first things to consider is the groups who may wish to harm your community. The purpose of this is not to create fear, but to foster awareness among staff members. Even in senior care communities, there are some groups of people who may be a potential danger. These include:

- Residents or their families who are unhappy with your community or staff.

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- Family members of residents whose unhappiness is from within their family and unrelated to your community, but who may act out at your community.
- Current or former employees.
- Random individuals or someone hoping to gain attention for a cause.

More important than the types of people who may perpetrate these actions are the actions themselves. With residents, their family members, and employees, you may be able to identify certain behaviors that could be clues to potential violent actions. Things like:

- Unusual, erratic, or agitated behaviors
- Conversations or actual or veiled threats relating to violence or the use of weapons
- Anger toward coworkers or residents by staff, visitors, or families
- Real or perceived personal loss such as a death, breakup, divorce or loss of a job
- Actual minor aggressive behaviors shouting and shoving

All of the above actions should be reported to a senior manager as soon as possible. Weapons of any kind that you observe or are told about should be reported immediately to the Administrator, Care Coordinator, or Director of Nursing, other senior manager, or the police.

Experts simply encourage us to be conscious of these sorts of behaviors. Research from past school shootings show that 93% of known violent perpetrators in an active shooter context have exhibited prior peculiar behaviors and conversations, 61% were seeking revenge, and 75% had feelings of being bullied, threatened or persecuted.<sup>1</sup>

What we are wanting to instill in all senior care communities and facilities is a strong and active "culture of awareness", which is the probably the most important macro preventative responsibility that you have. In part 2 of this series, we will discuss processes that can be added to a crisis management plan that address some of the threats of an active shooter scenario.

1. U.S. DOJ analysis of school shootings) Blair, J. Pete, Martaindale, M. Hunter and Terry Nichols. "Active Shooter Events 2000-2102". FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, January 2014. <http://leb.fbi.gov/2014/january/active-shooter-events-from-2000-to-2012> )

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