

Subject: Keeping Individuals Safe by Following ‘Their Plan’

Date: November 2011

As announced last week, OPWDD will be issuing health and safety alerts as a way of sharing of expectations, regulations, and information about incidents and other important topics such as best practices. **This first alert addresses the need to follow personalized care plans.**

OPWDD regulations require that each individual have a care plan that is suited to his or her unique physical, medical, behavioral, and social needs. Part of assessing a person’s needs includes determining adequate safeguards and oversight. Safeguards can address many areas, including:

- The level of supervision a person requires at home either generally or during specified activities, such as bathing and eating and while in the community;
- A person’s special dietary needs, consistency of foods, and assistance while eating; and
- The assistance a person requires for medication administration.

Any breakdown in following an individual’s plan can have devastating consequences. A few years ago, a non-ambulatory individual requiring one-to-one supervision near water was left unattended in a bathtub filling with water. When the employee returned, the individual had already drowned. Another drowning death occurred earlier this year due to a lack of adequate supervision late at night. Both of these deaths occurred because the level of oversight required by the individual’s plan was not followed.

Those providing care have a responsibility to follow every detail of the care plan for the individuals they support. Equally critical is that OPWDD and nonprofit providers recognize their responsibility to properly train and support employees to carry out care plans safely and effectively. Anyone providing support for individuals with developmental disabilities should make sure their daily routines address the following:

- Reviewing plan details at the start of a shift if a refresher is necessary;
- Seeking clarification on plan details or expectations when uncertainty exists; and
- Notifying a supervisor if it appears a care plan needs to be revised or no longer meets the individual’s needs.

For more comprehensive information, please see “Supporting Individuals to Achieve Personal Safety and Wellbeing” at:

www.opwdd.ny.gov/wt/memoranda/supporting_individuals_personal_safety_wellbeing.pdf.

The need to follow care plans should be reinforced frequently and supervisors should always demonstrate best practices. When visiting a program, supervisors should look for signs that care plans have not been followed, such as inadequate supervision levels, unattended food or beverages, or unknowledgeable staff. Any direct support staff professional with a question regarding how to follow a plan must take the initiative to ask a supervisor for clarification.

We all need to be vigilant—it just takes one mistake for a tragedy to occur.

Please contact OPWDD at people.first@opwdd.ny.gov should you have questions or concerns about the information in this alert or suggestions for future alerts.