

Group Homes: A Potentially Dangerous Alternative

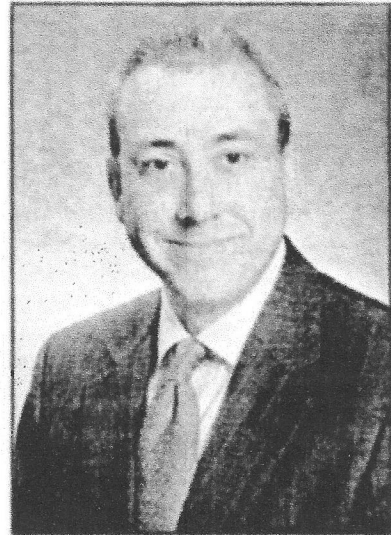
Having practiced exclusively in the realm of nursing home litigation for nearly 15 years, it is with significant concern that I have noticed the popularity and corporate backing of group homes on the rise in New Jersey. Although there certainly are many high quality group homes with dedicated staff, there are many for whom this cannot be said. This poses very major risks to a frail and vulnerable population whose family members are only seeking the best and most compassionate care for them. Group homes represent a residential setting, which is not technically considered to be a healthcare facility and therefore subject to far less regulation and oversight. That is, they are two steps down from nursing homes in the level of care that they provide. Group homes do not require twenty four hour nursing staff. However, some of these homes have actually been alleged by government

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officials to have advertised that they offer a higher level of nursing care than they actually do.

Sadly, our practice has seen an influx of catastrophic injuries suffered at group homes – which are not well enough equipped to handle folks with significant psychiatric, cognitive and physical needs. We have seen multiple deaths, pressure ulcers (bedsores), and beatings which have left victims in intensive care units, fighting for their lives. Once their records have been received, we have uncovered significant alterations of the official record, which constitutes false charting and most likely is a criminal offense.

It is quite important to carefully research any group home before admitting a loved one. There are many public resources available to review these facilities and New Jersey Public Records Law allows any consumer to obtain all survey and inspection records on any home they are considering. I strongly urge family members to carefully consider the needs of your loved ones, should you be considering a group home as an alternative to either assisted living or a nursing home – as their staffing is generally far different



in composition than those type of facilities.

New Jersey's legislature recognizes that these group homes have the potential to deprive residents of the rights that the rest of us enjoy without consideration and have provided a comprehensive set of legal protections, including a resident rights law, that allows families to pursue claims against group homes when their loved one is harmed or when their rights have been deprived.