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Zero Tolerance

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A common factor in many observed or suspected abuse incidents is that witnesses do not seem to understand what their responsibility is, or where and how to legally report the incident. Anyone who sees something that might lead to the harm of a child or other vulnerable individual is obligated by law to report that incident to child protective services/family services or the police, and if it's an emergency, to dial 911. Organizations should have clear policies indicating there is a zero tolerance for abuse. These policies should also direct all employees and volunteers on the actions they need to take when suspecting or observing actual abuse incidents.

Here are just a few statistics:

- A report of child abuse is made every ten seconds.
- More than five children die every day as a result of child abuse.
- More than 90% of juvenile sexual abuse victims know their perpetrator in some way.
- Child abuse occurs at every socioeconomic level, across ethnic and cultural lines, within all religions and at all levels of education.

The impact of remaining silent in the face of sexual abuse can be devastating. The recent media spotlight on child sexual abuse has created an opportunity for organizations to review their own policies and procedures for recognizing and reporting such incidents. Here are some

of the issues that should be evaluated in your organization:

Background Screening for Employees and Volunteers:

Hiring practices should include thorough background screening of all prospective employees and volunteers for criminal history and any reported incidents of abuse.

State Law: Each state is responsible for providing its own definitions of child abuse and neglect. Policies should be in compliance with state law related to definitions and reporting and investigation requirements.

Investigation: A key risk management tenet—whether an incident involves sexual abuse, sexual harassment or a dangerous condition in a facility—is to investigate **any and all** allegations. Allegations should

not be dismissed because of the position or influence of the suspected abuser. Everyone in the organization from volunteers to the Board of Directors must take such allegations seriously.

Related Policies: There should be written policies addressing professional boundaries as well as abuse reporting requirements. Professional boundary policies outline expected staff behavior when interacting with patients, their families or the public. There should be procedures in place to allow for adequate monitoring of caregivers/volunteers in the community or residential setting. All employees and volunteers should know that they are also responsible for reporting known or suspected boundary violations, which may be an indication of more serious behavior problems.

Education: There should be mandatory education on abuse prevention and reporting for all employees and volunteers at orientation and on an annual basis. Resources for this training, including a training video (see description below), can be found on our website, www.hccis.com.

Resource: Zero Tolerance Video

Healthcare workers in a community-based role are in a unique position to recognize and report abuse. This 27-minute training video is a thorough review of all types of abuse that may be identified including physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, financial exploitation, neglect, abandonment and self-neglect. The video includes candid interviews with healthcare workers who have identified abuse in their work experience and how they handled those situations. The focus of the video is on recognizing abuse, documenting your findings and reporting to the appropriate authorities. ♥