

# Jonathan Rosenfeld's Nursing Homes Abuse Blog

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## Temp Workers Becoming An Increasing Threat To Nursing Home Patients' Safety



As if we need another reason to be concerned over nursing home patient safety, an [article](#) in the L.A. Times on temporary nurses in hospitals and nursing homes will surely make you cringe. A desire to run a streamlined operation and the inherent uncertainty of required staffing levels has resulted in a booming temporary staffing industry-- in particular with nurses.

Unregulated and widely unknown, there are an estimated 3,000 to 6,000 temp. agencies in what is believed to be an industry that takes in more than \$4 billion per year--- and growing.

Though there are certainly many highly qualified and responsible nurses who eagerly accept jobs via temp agencies due to the flexibility and generous pay and benefits, there is a noticeable group of nurses working at temp companies that pose an immediate threat to patients.

An investigation by the non-profit group ProPublica and the Los Angeles Times, found many nurses were hired without any background or license checks. In particular, the investigation revealed nurses who had many problems with prior jobs, caring for the sick and elderly.

- Temp firms hired nurses with criminal backgrounds including: prostitution, stealing drugs and possession of cocaine
- Nurses who had their licenses suspended or restricted in other states were hired by temp firms
- Even after medical facilities continually complained about a nurses performance (nurses who made errors and fell asleep on the job), the nurse was placed at another facility
- Nurses who were terminated at one agency were quickly hired by another one without any questioning as to why they left the first agency

No surprise, but it always comes down to money

The lack of industry regulation, a national nursing shortage and easy profits (most temp agencies get paid a substantial percentage of the workers salary) does nothing to discourage people with no nursing or health care knowledge to the field.

Our sick and elderly deserve better. Patients can and should expect that the person who is caring for them is more than a warm body. Facilities must begin to demand that the full background checks be conducted on the fresh faces working in their facilities. On a regional and national level, elected officials must propose legislation to regulate this growing industry. Unfortunately, until these changes are made, we will continue to see preventable errors contribute to injury and death of patients.

Resources:

[Temp firms a magnet for unfit nurses, With scant regulation and some agencies' poor screening, workers can hopscotch from job to job.](#) L.A. Times, December 6, 2009

[Health Care Worker Registry,](#) Nursing Homes Abuse Blog, June 27, 2008

[Bye Bye Criminals,](#) Nursing Homes Abuse Blog, June 1, 2008

[Failure To Conduct Adequate Pre-Employment Criminal Background Search Costs Assisted Living Facility \\$750,000,](#) Nursing Homes Abuse Blog, June 5, 2009