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| Article: | Check health care providers' background |
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| Source: | Pekin Daily Times (USA) |

Families need to know that the nurses they hire to care for their ill loved ones are worthy of the trust being placed in them.

And it seems reasonable for families to think that if they submit a nurse's name to the Illinois Department of Human Services, the state would check the backgrounds of nurses and other caregivers.

But a Pekin family found out the hard way that the state does not in fact do such background checks.

Rick Rakow of Pekin hired Rebecca Jolene Groenewold of Delavan to take care of his terminally ill 26-year-old son. Rakow turned Groenewold's name over to the Illinois Department of Human Services, expecting that the government agency would do a thorough background check on Groenewold.

Groenewold told Rakow that she was a registered nurse. However, Rakow did not know her license had been revoked after she had "sexually attacked" a patient's father. Nor did he know she also had previously been on probation for stealing prescription medications.

When Rakow noticed that morphine kept coming up missing, he installed a video surveillance system. Ultimately, this led to Groenewold being charged on Jan. 8 with theft and possession of a controlled substance, a Class 4 felony. Groenewold was sentenced to two years probation and a \$500 fine.

Rakow later found out that the IDHS does not automatically do a background check on nurses working in home health care.

Illinois Department of Human Services Spokesman Tom Green said the department does background checks only when the client asks for them.

"A background check for all would be very expensive," said Green. "We do keep a list of personal attendants we have worked with and provide it to all customers."

Rep. Mike Smith (D-Canton) is considering introducing legislation that would require the state to perform background checks.

We think this is one of those cases in which governmental regulation is warranted — even in this time of tight budgets. Nobody wants to see anguished families learn too late that they entrusted the care of their loved ones to someone who might be dangerous or untrustworthy. We urge Smith to carry through with his plan to introduce legislation and we urge other state lawmakers to support it.
