

THE INDEPENDENT

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Brutal abuse in old-age home

By KIM ROBINSON

THE belief that the elderly are better cared for in old-age homes was shattered recently when camera footage taken at the Morton-Hall Resthome in Pinetown showed a staff member brutally assaulting an elderly resident with her hairbrush.

The Association for the Aged (Tafta) took over managerial duties of Morton-Hall Resthome on a temporary basis three months ago, after the previous management asked them to intervene in a watchdog capacity at the home.

Poor management, financial problems and theft are just some of the problems the Tafta management has had to address in the past few months.

Their most horrific discovery was the assault and abuse of their elderly residents by several members of the home's staff.

Frail

Many families put their elderly relatives into old-age homes with the belief that they will be better cared for. They will enjoy three healthy meals a day and benefit from experienced staff who are on hand to help the frail and aged maintain a relatively normal lifestyle.

However, a hidden camera revealed to shocked Tafta management the hidden goings-on at the home.

The abuse is alleged to take many forms: verbal, physical and passive.

Inexplicable bruising has appeared on the bodies of some elderly residents and reports have surfaced of residents being left on toilets for hours, or not even being taken to the toilets despite pleading.

Tafta acted on the reports immediately, taking extraordinary measures to ensure they curbed the alleged abuse.

One measure was to call in a private detective agency, Justicia Investigations.

'If my mother were treated like that, I would have dondered them'

PIETER KITSHOFF
Private investigator

Headed by Mr Reg Horne and Mr Pieter Kitshoff, the unit consists of 10 investigators, mostly ex-policemen. They have seven divisions - corporate, under-cover, electronic, counter-electronic, finance, insurance and domestic investigations.

A large network of informants, contacts and under-cover agents feed vital information to the unit. Their hi-tech electronic equipment is the same used by the FBI in America and includes bugging, de-bugging devices and miniature cameras.

Combining their divisions, the investigators set up a covert operation to flush out the abusive staff.

They have been employed by Tafta for nearly two months and are still deep in the investigation, reporting their findings to the association's management.

Even the hardened investigators were shocked at the abuse being handed out at the old-age home.

"If my mother were treated like that, I would have dondered them," Kitshoff said.

Mrs Margie Smith, divisional manager for income development and Tafta media liaison officer, said the issue was sensitive and Tafta had to be "incredibly careful" in handling the case.

She said they recently had a conference with other rest homes in the area to discuss abuse, indicators and causes and were in the process of setting up a 24-hour help line.

"We are taking action to stamp out this abuse," she said.

