Not only does the level of protection need to ensure security but it also must allow for acceptable freedom of movement amongst its staff and patients.

The security of an assisted living or nursing home might also need to extend to protecting residents from themselves. Many of these facilities are home to individuals with Alzheimer’s or dementia. These residents require special attention and can benefit from systems to prevent elopement. While we won’t cover those specific technologies here, an understanding of what systems are in use is critical when designing and installing a security system.

Controlling access to protect assets

Controlling access and protecting assets has become ever more important to nursing homes and assisted living organizations. Thanks to the additional focus on security, the last few years have seen innovations in how facilities are designed and protected, with emphasis placed on structural integrity and logistical flow.

**Patented key systems.** Let’s start with the basics. Even the design and implementation of keys has made advancements. With the use of a patented key system, such as those from Schlage, assisted living facilities can better protect against duplication because key blanks may only be acquired through the system’s manufacturer. Since designs are patented, attempts to duplicate the design without permission are subject to federal law.

**Electronic locks and credential readers.** There are a number of different applications within a healthcare facility that require varying levels of access control. From perimeter doors to medical records and pharmacy rooms to linen and supplies storage – every area has unique requirements. The AD- and CO-Series electronic locks from Schlage and credential readers from aptiQ are available with features and options to fit every application – whether it’s a standalone keypad electronic lock with audit trail capability, a wirelessly networked electronic lock that can be upgraded at a later date, or a reader that can read both proximity and smart cards at the same time – the current and future function of each specific opening should be considered when specifying a solution.

**Smart cards.** Contactless smart credentials provide the highest level of security, compatibility and scalability. They can be customized to meet present security and safety issues but will accommodate other applications that let the system easily, quickly and affordably grow and adapt as needed. The flexible design of smart credentials such as the aptiQ MIFARE DESFire EV1 helps them support diversified applications ranging from physical and logical access to cashless vending and parking. Smart card users can gain access to areas of the facility, such as prescription drugs are kept, where only they have been granted special access as well as use equipment, tools and other physical assets.

**Biometric readers.** Biometric technology may be a viable solution for both the access control and time and attendance systems within a long-term care organization. By scanning a user’s physical feature, such as hand geometry, biometric devices identify the user and then relay the information back to the system to check access rights or sign them in for their work shift. Because the biometric device, such as those from Schlage, checks a physical characteristic of a person, it...
eliminates the practice of employees loaning their credentials to others. Biometrics ensures the person is who they say they are. Borrowing another’s card or PIN code isn’t enough. In one facility, administrators discovered that they had been spending too much time manually processing the payroll data. Plus, they discovered that some employees were fraudulently filling out timecards for their friends, which was costing them thousands of dollars each month in unwarranted wages. Biometrics puts an immediate halt to such buddy-punching. Also, before designing a system, see if biometrics are being used in time and attendance. If the organization is already using biometrics for this application, it is much easier to integrate biometrics into some of the access/egress points.

**Wireless technology.** For many years security devices at the opening needed to be hardwired to the access control panel. Running wire was expensive and the dust of the construction threatened to contaminate patient care areas. Now, wireless devices such as readers and electronic locks are becoming a standard solution due to their reliability and ease of installation. And the ability of Schlage AD-400 Series wireless locks to wake up and enable immediate lockdown status and still maintain battery life (instead of waiting to check every 10 minutes for a signal) make wireless solutions viable for facilities that require lockdown capabilities.

**Access control software.** Most facilities should be able to find and implement access control software that is effective, inexpensive and easy to use. The software will not only let administrators manage access rights, but allows administrators to quickly change authorization or door status in case of emergency.

Facilities that see value in an access control system but are concerned about the cost should keep in mind that not every opening and access point in the facility must be included. Openings considered nonessential can still be protected by more conventional means. To serve smaller facilities, there are access control systems on the market have been created specifically with facilities with fewer than 32 controlled openings in mind.

**What's special about long-term care facilities?** Nursing homes are different than many other healthcare facilities. Most residents will live there for the rest of their lives and will rarely leave the building. This “facility” turns into their home and the other residents and staff can be thought of as family. Keep this in mind when designing a security system — there needs to be a balance between security and creating a comfortable place for residents to live out their lives.

That being said, there are a number of security issues to design for:

- **Control of access to supply closets and hazardous spaces.** Some residents may suffer from Alzheimer’s or dementia, or may just be curious as to what’s behind the many doors of the facility.
- **Control of exits to avoid residents leaving without knowledge of staff and possibly becoming lost or injured.**
- **Control of departments or areas within the facility – and compatibility with other affiliated facilities’ security system.** Some nursing homes may be connected to a hospital or another type of senior living facility and require staff to easily move between environments.
- **Perimeter and common area security.** Some organizations use their facility to serve community needs. Common areas could be used for meetings or gatherings, and the facility may offer shelter to the homeless during severe weather. Creating secure zones for the residents will help keep them safe when outside activities may be happening in their home.
- **Security of personal belongings.** Many residents bring in special things to make their rooms feel more like home. Be sure to inquire into the facilities’ plans to allow residents to secure their personal belongings.

**Safety & security fosters healthcare success**

With advanced design strategies, innovative hardware and careful system design, your assisted living and nursing home clients can better control the security of its inhabitants, protect valuable assets, and create a safe environment that fosters better resident care.