

Elder Patients at Risk for Abuse

Fact Sheet
Elder Abuse
June 2008

Elder abuse is any form of mistreatment that results in harm or loss to an elder. As awareness about elder abuse increases nationwide, its presence is also on the rise in Indian Country.

Traditionally, American Indian elders have held a place of honor for their wisdom, experience and cultural knowledge. Unfortunately, this is changing in some communities.

Only 20% of abuse is reported.

Source: U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging, The National Elder Abuse Incidence Study, 1988.

How can Health and Medical Professionals get Involved?

1. *Screen for abuse* and be aware of the various types:
 - Financial Exploitation
 - Neglect and Self-Neglect
 - Psychological Abuse
 - Physical Abuse
 - Sexual Abuse
 - Spousal Abuse
 - Institutional Abuse
2. Participate in Interdisciplinary Geriatric Teams;
3. Encourage adoption of abuse protocols and screening;
4. Prompt medical associations to get involved; and,
5. Learn more about elder abuse.

Source: Lantz, Melinda S., M.D., Abuse and Neglect of the Older Adult: What Can the Physician Do? *Clinical Geriatrics*, Vol. 11, No. 3, March 2003, pp. 18-22.

What makes an older adult more vulnerable to abuse?

Social isolation and poor mental health (such as dementia or depression) are two factors in elder vulnerability. In some situations, studies show that living with someone else (a caregiver or a friend) may increase the chances for abuse to occur. A history of domestic violence or spousal abuse may also make an Elder more susceptible to abuse.

Characteristics of Victims

Age of Victims. Median age: 77.9 years.

Self-neglecting elders: 77.4 years.

Sex of Victims. Abuse of females in 67.3% of reports; males 32.4%.

Source: National Center on Elder Abuse, Factsheet No. 3, 1997.

Warning Signs and Symptoms of Abuse:

While one sign does not necessarily indicate abuse, the following are some telltale signs that there could be a problem.

1. Bruises, pressure marks, broken bones, abrasions, and burns may be an indication of physical abuse, neglect, or mistreatment.
2. Unexplained withdrawal from normal activities, a sudden change in alertness, and depression may be indicators of emotional abuse.
3. Bruises around the breast or genital area can occur from sexual abuse.
4. Sudden changes in financial situations may be the result of exploitation.
5. Bedsores, unattended medical needs, poor hygiene, and unusual weight loss are indicators of possible neglect.
6. Behavior such as belittling, threats, and other uses of power and control by spouses are indicators of verbal or emotional abuse.
7. Strained or tense relationships and frequent arguments between the caregiver and elder are also signs.
8. Hoarding, failure to take essential medications or refuse to seek medical treatment, poor hygiene or housekeeping, dehydration, and not wearing suitable clothing for weather can be signs of self-neglect.

Source: Lantz, Melinda S., M.D., Abuse and Neglect of the Older Adult: What Can the Physician Do? *Clinical Geriatrics*, Vol. 11, No. 3, March 2003, pp. 18-22.

Questions to Consider

The following are questions to consider in creating or modifying an existing screening tool:

- Is the elder in imminent danger?



- Is the elder able to talk openly about his or her care? (Caregiver or companion may need to leave the room for assessment to take place.)
- Is the elder in need of emergency services to prevent injury or loss?
- What is the nature and extent of the abuse?
- Is abuse likely to occur again?
- What is the level of risk?
- Is the elder able to make decisions about his or her care?
- What measures are needed to prevent future abuse and ensure the well-being of the elder?

Source: National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse. <http://www.preventelderabuse.org>.

Assessment Instrument

The Elder Assessment Instrument (EAI), a 41-item Likert scale, in the literature since 1984, and comprised of seven sections that review symptoms and subjective complaints of abuse. Instrument is available at www.hartfordign.org and/or www.ConsultGeriRN.org

The Role of Culture

The answers to these questions can provide guidance to professionals in working with members of diverse ethnic and cultural communities.

- What role do elders play in the family? In the community?
- Who, within the family, is expected to provide care to frail members? What happens when they fail to do so?
- Who makes decisions about how family resources are expended? About other aspects of family life?
- Who, within the family, do members turn to in times of conflict or strife?
- What conduct is considered abusive? Is it considered abusive to use an elder's resources for the benefit of other family members? To ignore a family member?
- What spiritual beliefs, past experiences, attitudes about social service agencies or law enforcement, or social stigmas may affect community members' decisions to accept or refuse help from outsiders?
- Under what circumstances will families seek help from outsiders?

- To whom will they turn for help (e.g. members of the extended family, respected members of the community, religious leaders, physicians)?
- What/who are the trusted sources of information in the community?
- How do persons with limited English speaking or reading skills get their information about resources?

Source: National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse. <http://www.preventelderabuse.org>.

Resources

New Mexico Geriatric Education Center

The UNM New Mexico Geriatric Education Center (NMGEC) is dedicated to improving the health care of American Indian elders through the education and training of health care providers.

See NMGEC website for complete list of elder abuse fact sheets.

1001 Medical Arts Ave NE, Rm #244
Albuquerque, NM 87102-2708
Phone: (505) 272-4934
Fax: (505) 272-4962
<http://hsc.unm.edu/som/fcm/gec/>

National Indian Council on Aging

The National Indian Council on Aging (NICOA) strives to improve health and social services for American Indian and Alaska Native Elders nationwide, including providing education, awareness and advocacy about elder abuse.

See "Publications" on website for more elder abuse resources and fact sheets.

10501 Montgomery Blvd.NE Ste. 210
Albuquerque, NM 87111
Phone: (505) 292-2001
Fax: (505) 292-1922
<http://www.nicoa.org>

Using Tribal Values to Develop Elder Protection Code: A Step-by-Step Community Approach

A workbook for communities exploring the process of Elder Protection Code. Available at NMGEC or NICOA websites.

Produced by National Indian Council on Aging and the University of New Mexico Geriatric Education Center through a grant from HRSA Bureau of Health Professions #D31HP08820.