Introduction

Elder Abuse is defined as an act or omission that leads to harm, or that threatens harm, to the health or welfare of an older person.

- Widespread problem affecting hundreds of thousands of elderly across the country.
  - problem will ↑ as population of elders ↑
- Largely hidden under shroud of family secrecy (under-reported)
- Only 1 in 14 domestic elder abuse incidents reported to the authorities

Incidence

- In 1996, 820,000-1,860,000 abused elders in the country.
- Only 16% were reported to agencies
- 5x as many reported were unreported
- Female elders are abused at higher rate, after accounting for their larger proportion in population.
- Our oldest (>80)
- 90% is a family member (2/3 adult children or spouses)
Elder maltreatment

- Who are the victims?
- Who are the perpetrators?
- Who are the reporters?
- What are the characteristics of self-neglecting elders?
- What is the extent of problem?
- How do we identify problem?

Elder maltreatment: 7 types of abuse & neglect

1. Elder physical abuse
2. Sexual abuse
3. Emotional or psychological abuse
4. Financial or material exploitation
5. Abandonment
6. Neglect
7. Self-neglect

1. Elder Physical Abuse

Physical force that may result in bodily injury, physical pain or impairment.

- Location: bi-lateral bruises, upper body such as...
- Type: bruises in the shapes of objects, in different stages of healing
- Injuries inconsistent with explanation
- Burns in unusual size, shapes or locations
- Repeated use of emergency room services
- Delay
2. Sexual Abuse
Non-consensual sexual contact of any kind with an elderly person.
- Difficulty in walking or sitting without evidence of muscular-skeletal disease such as arthritis
- Bruising on the inner thighs
- Vaginal bleeding not associated with menses
- Presence of sperm in the vagina or anus
- Unexplained STD or infection

3. Emotional/Psychological Abuse
Infliction of anguish, pain or distress
- Confusion
- Signs of depression
- Anxiety
- Passivity
- Fear

4. Financial/Material Exploitation
Illegal or improper use of elder’s funds, property, or assets
- Inability to pay bills for …
- Credit card bills from clothing or electronic equipment suppliers not likely to be frequented by victim
- Anxiety when discussing finances
- Unusual transfers of assets to another person
5. Abandonment
Desertion of an elderly person by an individual who had physical custody/responsibility of the elder

- Same indicators as neglect

6. Neglect
Refusal or failure to fulfill any part of a person’s obligations or duties to an elder

- Passive Vs. Active Neglect:
- Indicators of Neglect:
  - General deterioration of health: malnutrition, dehydration, hypothermia, decubitus ulcers
  - Misuse of medications
  - Excessive dirt or odor
  - Failure to provide necessary prosthetic devices

7. Self-neglect
Behaviors of an elderly person that threatens his/her own health or safety

- Malnutrition
- Hypothermia
- Dehydration
- Decubitus ulcers
- General deterioration of health
- Excessive dirt or odor
- Misuse of medications
Who are the perpetrators?

- Men: 52.5% of time
  - abandonment: 83% were men
  - physical abuse: 63% men
  - emotional: 60% were men
  - financial: 59% men
- women: 53% of cases of neglect

Risk for Abuse

- Physical or cognitive impairment of the victim
- Isolation of the victim
- Caregiver Stress
- Dependence of the abuser on the victim
- Psychopathology or mental incapacity of the abuser, caregivers and strangers

Recognizing Elder Abuse: Possible Indicators

- Cuts, lacerations, puncture wounds
- bruises, welts, discolorations
- any injury incompatible with history
- any injury not properly cared for
- Poor skin condition or hygiene
- absence of hair&/or hemorrhaging below scalp
- dehydration/malnourished without illness
- wt loss
- burns (cigarettes,rope)
- soiled clothing or bed
Possible Indicators of Psychological Abuse
- Helplessness
- hesitation to talk openly
- implausible stories
- confusion or disorientation
- anger
- Fear
- withdrawal
- depression
- denial
- agitation

Possible Indicators of Financial Abuse
- Unusual or inappropriate bank activity
- check signatures don’t match person’s
- unusual concern that excessive money is being spent on care
- many unpaid bills, overdue rent when there….
- Placement in nursing home or facility not commensurate with size of estate
- lack of amenities (TV, clothes) affordable for that person
- missing personal items (jewelry)
- deliberate isolation

Possible Indicators of Neglect by Caregiver
- Dirt, feces, urine smell or other health/safety hazards in living environment
- rashes, sores or lice
- inadequately clothed
- Malnourished or dehydrated
- elder has an untreated medical condition
Possible Indicators of Self-Neglect

- Inability to manage personal finances
- Inability to manage ADL’s
- Suicidal acts, wanderings, refusing medical attention, isolation, substance abuse
- Lack of toilet facilities, utilities, or animal infested home
- Rashes, sores, urine/fecal smell, etc.
- Changes in intellectual functioning, disorient, inapprop response
- Not keeping medical appts for serious illness

Possible Indicators of Abuse from caregivers

- Others speak for elder
- Attitude of indifference or anger to dependent
- Absence of assistance
- Family member blames elder
- Aggressive behavior (threats, insults, harassment)
- Previous Hx. of abuse to others
- Substance abuser
- Inappropriate display of affection by caregiver
- Flirtatious, coyness
- Social isolation of family
- Conflicting accounts of incidents

Mandatory reporting of elder abuse

- Who must report?
- Where to report?
- Penalty for not reporting?
- Confidentiality
Assessment

- Shame or embarrassment
- Fear of retaliation from
- Increasing powerlessness

- Treat with respect
- Ask for permission
- Tell the patient:
  - you have seen this situation before in others
  - often injuries are caused by members of the family
- Ask directly

Assessment interview

- Has anyone at home ever hurt you?
- Has anyone touched you when you didn’t want to be touched?
- Has anyone forced you to do something against your will?

- Has anyone taken anything from you that was yours without perm?
- Have you ever given anything away even thought you really didn’t want to? Why?

Physical Exam

- General
  - poor hygiene, emaciation, fractures, incontinence and weight loss.
- Skin
  - bruising, burns, abrasions, or tenderness
- Head
  - Bruises, eye injuries, poor oral hygiene, alopecia or change in hair texture

- Musculoskeletal
  - Fractures – old or new

- Neurological
  - Mini-mental State Exam
  - Mood and LOC

- Genitalia/rectal
  - Poor hygiene, inguinal rash, signs of sexual abuse
Management

- No legal mandate to report elder abuse
- Emphasis in NY is on education and referral to Protective Services for Adults (PSA)
- Law provides immunity in civil lawsuits for referrals to PSA
- Ethical dilemmas may arise for practitioners

Services available through protective services

- Assessment
- Counseling
- Cases Management
- Advocacy
- Money Management
- Finding alternative living arrangements
- Consulting with other service providers

Principles for Intervention & Decision Making

- Autonomy
- Least Restrictive Alternative
- Presumption of Competence
The End