



Elder Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation PRIMARY CARE PRACTICE SHEET #5

Elder abuse can be defined as the infliction of physical, emotional, sexual harm, neglect or financial exploitation onto an older adult

Most elder abuse is perpetrated family members. Elder abuse often goes unreported because of victim isolation. Often the only contact an older adult has outside the home may be with the primary care provider or other health care professionals.

Important principles to remember

- While the majority of caregivers, both informal and paid caregivers, provide excellent and safe care for their loved ones, most elder abuse is perpetrated by a family member.
- Many elders are at risk of becoming abused by their caregivers because of their powerlessness within the caregiving relationship.
- Many recipients of care are reluctant to report elder abuse out of fear of losing their caregiver or putting their caregiver at risk of legal consequences.
- To make a report of abuse, neglect, or exploitation of an incapacitated or dependent adult, call the Adult Protective Service's nationwide 24-hour Hotline toll-free at 1-800-624-8404.

Indicators of abuse in older primary care patients

- *Physical abuse* may include suspicious bruises or physical injuries, bone fractures or broken bones, overdose or under use of prescription medications; caregiver refusal to see the elder alone
- *Sexual abuse* may include injuries to the mouth, breast, genitals or anus; unexplained bleeding or infection
- *Emotional or Psychological* abuse may include emotional withdrawal, agitation and unusual behavior
- *Neglect* indicators may include dehydration, malnutrition, untreated medical conditions, inappropriate or inadequate clothing; unclean living environment

Questions to ask

- Are you able to use the telephone whenever you want to?
- Are you afraid of anyone at home?
- Has anyone ever threatened you?
- Does anyone make you do things that you don't want to do?
- Has anyone tried to keep you from doing things you enjoy doing?
- Has anyone touched you without your permission?
- Has anyone ever hurt you?

PRIMARY CARE PRACTICE TIP

As a primary care provider you play a critical role in identifying and addressing elder abuse. Familiarity with the signs of abuse will help you to identify patients who may be at risk. Take time to engage in discussion with your patients and probe any inconsistencies. Make sure to document signs of abuse. Report any suspicions of abuse to Adult Protective Services immediately.

**For more information call your Area Agency on Aging
1-877-353-3771**

Maine Primary Partners in Caregiving is a joint project of the Eastern Agency on Aging and the University of Maine Center on Aging, in partnership with Aroostook Area Agency on Aging, Eastern Maine Medical Center, Horizons Health Service, Indian Township Tribal Health Center, Norumbega Medical, Rosscare, and Senior Spectrum.