

Case Study

Elder Neglect and Abuse

An 85-year old man is brought to a retirement community by his daughter to view an assisted living apartment. The daughter is noted to appear tired and irritated. She was heard yelling at her father in the parking lot and threatened him during the interview. The older man was quiet, withdrawn, and smelled of urine and stool. You turn to the ACE Card to review concerns as you approach this complex situation. *MPM*



ACE Cards® Elder Neglect and Abuse

Acute Care for the Elderly (ACE) Program
Aurora Sinai Medical Center/UW Medical School

Elder Neglect

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

Elder Abuse

Intentional actions resulting in harm of an older adult: physical, sexual, psychological, and/or the exploitation of money and property.

Patient-Related Risk Factors for Elder Abuse

- Dementia
- Disruptive/aggressive behaviors

Caregiver-Related Risk Factors for Elder Abuse

- Shared living conditions
- Caregiver burden/stress
- Social isolation
- Financial interdependence/motivations
- Caregiver mental illness
- Caregiver drug/alcohol abuse
- Emotional dependence of caregiver on elder
- History of "family" dysfunction/abuse
- Poor coping skills of caregiver
- Limited use/knowledge or refusal of resources



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Recognition of the Mistreated Senior

(Many of these findings are clues, but may not be diagnostic.)

General Observations

- Poor hygiene
- Poor nutrition and hydration status
- Frequent exacerbation of common illnesses
- Long delay between presentation of patient's problem and seeking help
- Elder may appear fearful of caregiver
- Caregiver may refuse to leave a patient's side
- A change in the pattern of office visits
- A pattern of unusual vaginal or rectal bleeding
- Family not giving medications
 - Evidenced by subtherapeutic medication levels or exacerbations of previously stable chronic illness
- Withdrawal or infantilizing of patient

Skin and Other Organ Findings

- Multiple and/or unusual pattern of bruises
- Multiple pressure ulcers with infection or infestation
- Overgrown, unkempt nails
- Matted hair
- Fecal impaction
- Delirium/depression

Most Important Practice Behaviors

- Interview patient and caregiver together and individually
- Ask all elderly patients about mistreatment if there are inconsistencies in history of injuries or illness
- Perform thorough physical exam with patient in gown
- Obtain social and cognitive assessment
- Report suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation to local protective service agency

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This ACE (Acute Care for the Elderly) Card™ on *Elder Neglect and Abuse* was developed by Dr. Michael Malone at Aurora Health Care in Milwaukee, WI. These geriatric care reminder cards will be published in *MPM* as resources to help clinicians manage common conditions that plague elderly patients. The complete series of cards can be ordered from Dr. Malone at Michael.Malone.MD@aurora.org. Michael Malone, MD, is the Medical Director of Senior Services at Aurora Health Care in Milwaukee, WI.