

# An Introduction to Elder Abuse for Professionals: Neglect



# Understanding Neglect

# Learning Objectives

At the end of this presentation, you will be able to:

- Define and describe neglect
- Define what makes someone a caregiver
- Identify common indicators
- Identify strategies to respond to possible neglect situations

# Case Example

- 33 year old Elvira provides care for her 94-year-old grandfather Saleem who requires constant care.
- Saleem is brought to the local hospital emergency department, comatose, with 13 severe bedsores including one that is so deep that Saleem's artificial hip from a recent surgery is visible.

# Case Example

- Frank is 83 and has dementia which can no longer be cared for at home. He moved into a facility 6 months ago.
- While at the facility he has lost considerable weight and spends much of his time locked in his room because he wanders. Staff does not like caring for him as he is combative.
- He is found unconscious in his room by staff and dies en route to the hospital. The medical examiner finds evidence of dehydration, malnourishment, and 9 infected pressure ulcers. Cause of death is sepsis.

# Case Example (cont.)

- Constance, a 72 year old tribal member with dementia and arthritis relies on her daughter, Rose, to provide care, help her take her medications, and cook her meals.
- Rose, who lives with her mother, does not give Constance her pain medications, keeps her locked and alone in a dark bedroom, does not take her to tribal ceremonies, and gives her only cereal to eat.
- Constance has become more confused, is depressed, has lost weight, and is in constant pain.

# Neglect

- The refusal or failure to fulfill any part of a person's obligations or duties to an elder.
- Neglect may also include:
  - Failure of a person who has fiduciary responsibilities to provide care for an elder (e.g., pay for necessary home care services), or
  - Failure on the part of an in-home service provider to provide necessary care (National Center on Elder Abuse)

Consider adding state, tribal, or territorial statutes relating to neglect (including statutes and case law describing what makes someone a caregiver in this jurisdiction) here. These may be found in criminal law, protective services, or other, statutes.

Consider inserting elder abuse reporting laws in the Response section. The placeholder slide is \*.

# Neglect Often Co-Occurs with Other Forms of Elder Abuse

Always consider if financial exploitation is occurring or has occurred

- As a result of financial exploitation, assets to provide for elder's needs may be gone
- Abuser may keep an elder's assets to protect his/her anticipated inheritance

# Victims Are Often

- Frail
- Physically and/or cognitively impaired
- Dependent on others
- Isolated
- Unable to report

# Indicators: Potential Victim

- Confusion or delirium
- Dehydration
- Malnutrition
- Decayed teeth
- Overgrown nails
- Matted, infested hair
- Over- or under- or mis-medicated
- Unexplained weight loss
- Pressure ulcers

# Pressure Ulcers

- Also known as “decubitus ulcers,” “pressure sores” or “bedsores”
- Result of pressure on bony parts of body such as shoulder blades, buttocks, hips, ankle, heel of foot
- May occur even when elder is receiving proper care (Liao, et al (2010))
  - May be outcome of an underlying medical condition
- Presence alone does not prove neglect is occurring
  - Is the wound receiving proper care?

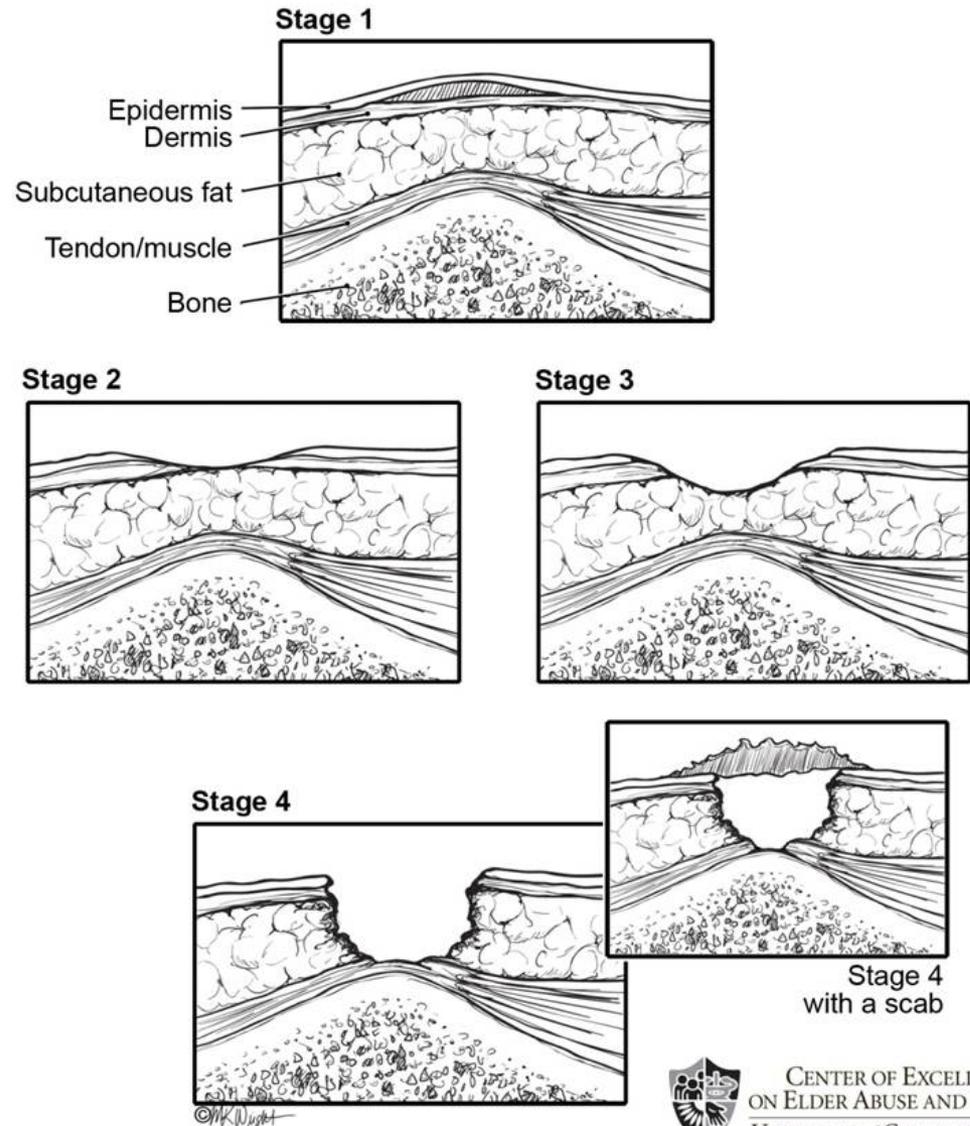
# Pressure Ulcers (cont'd)



# Pressure Ulcer – Four Stages

## NOTE:

- Location (esp. if not a bony prominence)
- Multiple locations and on multiple planes of the body
- Stinking wound
- Attempts at care/treatment and documentation



# Indicators: Caregiver

- Caregiver
  - Missing or absent
  - Living in significantly better conditions than elder in same residence
  - More focused on cost of care than needs of older adult, especially when elder should be able to afford items or care
  - Feels overburdened and/or resentful

# Indicators: The Environment

- Residence is poorly maintained, unsafe, or unclean
- Lack of heating or cooling
- Lack of appropriate food for elder
- Foul odors
- Infestations of vermin and/or insects
- Lack of assistive devices (e.g., hearing aids, glasses, dentures, mobility aids) that the older person should have or has had

# Indicators: In Facilities

- Failure to provide:
  - Adequate nutrition and fluids
  - Safety measures such as bedrails, as ordered
  - Needed services, e.g., turning a bedridden patient, cleaning bedding and clothing for an incontinent patient
- Failure to notify a responsible party when:
  - A significant change in a resident's situation has occurred
  - A resident is injured
- Withholding services to punish or discipline
- Ignoring calls for assistance

# Impact

- Neglect may be the result of inaction or poor caregiving by caregivers who lack the necessary resources, skills or support
- **In some instances** neglect may be a crime
- Irrespective of the reason for the neglect, suspected neglect should be reported or referred in order to increase health care and services for the older adult and to trigger an investigation

# Response to Neglect



# Victim Safety

***All responses and interventions must consider and prioritize victim safety.***

# What You Can Do

- **Recognize the Signs of Neglect**
- **Ask**
- **Report or Refer**

## If The Older Adult Can Answer Questions, Consider Asking:

- What can you do for yourself and what do you need help doing?
- Who provides that help?
- Is that person paid? By whom? How many hours a day do they help you?
- What medications should you be taking? Do you take them all? If not, why?

\*Ask privately in an area where you will not be overheard

## If The Older Adult Can Answer Questions, Consider Asking:

- How do you feel? Are you in pain? Do you take pain medications?
- Are you left alone? How often?
- Do you have glasses? Dentures? Walker? Cane? Wheelchair?
- Do you often feel hungry? Thirsty? Tell me more about that.

\*Ask privately in an area where you will not be overheard

# Report - Refer

## REPORT

- 911 or law enforcement (life threatening or possible crime)
- Adult protective services
- Licensing board (if abuse occurs in a facility)

## REFER

- Domestic violence or sexual assault organization
- Aging network agency
- Ombudsman (if abuse is in a facility)



Consider Inserting Slides  
Describing the Local  
Jurisdiction's Elder Abuse/  
Vulnerable Adult Reporting Law

Consider adding local resources and programs. (See “*A Guide to Planning Your Elder Abuse Presentation*” at \*\*\*\*\* for more information.)

# For more information, visit us!

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**For additional resources, visit [www.ncea.aoa.gov](http://www.ncea.aoa.gov)**

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