

Red Flags of Abuse

Do you know a senior or an adult with a disability who displays warning signs of mistreatment?

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Neglect

- Lack of basic hygiene, adequate food, or clean and appropriate clothing
- Lack of medical aids (glasses, walker, teeth, hearing aid, medications)
- Person with dementia left unsupervised
- Person confined to bed left without care
- Home cluttered, filthy, in disrepair, or has fire and safety hazards
- Homes without adequate facilities (stove, refrigerator, heat, cooling, working plumbing and electricity)
- Untreated pressure "bed" sores

Financial Abuse/Exploitation

- Lack of amenities victim can afford
- Vulnerable elder/adult "voluntarily" giving uncharacteristically excessive payments/gifts for needed care and companionship
- Caregiver has control over finances, but is failing to provide for elder's needs
- Newly-changed legal documents (Power of Attorney, will, etc.) that elder is unable to comprehend

Psychological/Emotional Abuse

- Withdrawal from normal activities, unexplained changes in alertness
- Caregiver isolates elder by controlling access to him/her
- Caregiver is verbally aggressive or demanding, controlling, overly concerned about finances of elder

Physical/Sexual Abuse

- Inadequately explained fractures, bruises, welts, cuts, sores or burns
- Unexplained sexually transmitted diseases

If you know someone who is in immediate danger, call 911 or local law enforcement

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WHAT IS ELDER ABUSE?

In general, elder abuse refers to intentional or neglectful acts by a caregiver or "trusted" individual that lead to, or may lead to, harm of a vulnerable elder. In Washington State, younger adults with disabilities qualify for the same legal protections. Physical abuse; neglect; emotional or psychological abuse; sexual abuse; and abandonment are considered forms of elder abuse.

WHO IS AT RISK?

Elder abuse can occur anywhere -- in the home, in assisted living facilities, or other institutions. It affects seniors across all socio-economic groups, cultures and races.

Based on available information, women and older elders are more likely to be victimized. Dementia and isolation are also significant risk factors.

WHAT IF ABUSE IS SUSPECTED?

Report your concerns.

Most cases of elder abuse go undetected. Don't assume that someone has already reported a suspicious situation. The agency receiving the report will ask what you observed, who was involved, and who they can contact to learn more. You do not need to prove that abuse is occurring in order to report your suspicions.

Adult Protective Services: 1-866-END-HARM

If you know someone who is in immediate danger, call 911 or local law enforcement

PROTECTING VULNERABLE ADULTS

By Mark Lindquist

Mr. Villegas' life savings began to dwindle under the control of his daughter. He was 81-years-old with dementia and early Alzheimer's. Frugal, he lived on a modest income. His savings was nearly \$200,000, primarily from the sale of his home, but his daughter drained his account to almost nothing over the course of a few years.

Without money, Mr. Villegas could not afford the assisted living he needed. Luckily, Mr. Villegas' son Robert became aware of the situation and intervened. Mr. Villegas' daughter went to prison for the theft and Mr. Villegas moved in with his son, where he was properly cared for.

In 2011, I formed an Elder Abuse Unit to protect elders and vigorously prosecute those who take advantage of vulnerable adults. We recognized that as our population ages, there are more elders who need more protection. Since then, our office has been a leader in the prosecution and prevention of elder abuse, whether it's financial exploitation, physical abuse, or neglect.

Initially, our Elder Abuse Unit was a one-woman team with Deputy Prosecutor Erika Nohavec. Yes, as Erika sometimes joked, there can be an "I" in team. Our team subsequently expanded to include two deputy prosecutors, two victim advocates, and a legal assistant. The Pierce County Council recognized the vital work we

were doing and provided the additional staff.

We aim to be leaders in the prosecution and prevention of elder abuse just as we have been leaders in reducing gang violence and removing career criminals from our streets. We innovate, we collaborate, we excel. In 2016, we won a grant from the Department of Justice of nearly \$400,000 -- we were one of only nine counties in the country to receive this award. The funds are being used to coordinate a comprehensive approach to protecting elders and other vulnerable adults.

One major component of this comprehensive approach was the formation of the Coordinated Community Response Team. This group includes prosecutors, law enforcement departments, the Attorney General's Office, Adult Protective Services, the Korean Women's Association, and other stakeholders.

Our vision is to create a safe community for vulnerable adults. Our mission is to effectively respond to the needs of older victims, hold abusers accountable, identify and bridge the gaps in services available to victims, and improve coordination between service providers through multidisciplinary collaboration. This collaboration also helps us hold offenders accountable. Working with multiple agencies, our office successfully prosecuted a caregiver in 2016 for a shocking case of neglect.

Mr. Carter was found nonresponsive in his bed and was rushed to Good Samaritan Hospital. Several

large and deep pressure ulcers were discovered on his backside, the worst of which was 8x13 inches and went down to the bone.

His paid caregiver packed the wounds with paper towels and Neosporin. This led to a serious infection, which ultimately killed Mr. Carter. Doctors and nurses said it was worst example of neglect they had seen in their careers. This was the first murder conviction in Washington premised on a failure to seek necessary medical care for a vulnerable adult.

We prosecute and we prevent. Raising awareness and educating people on how to protect themselves, their friends, and their family members is part of how we reduce crimes against the vulnerable and keep them safe. If you know of a group that would benefit from hearing from us, please let us know. Deputy Sven Nelson, the current supervisor of the Elder Abuse Unit, is happy to speak with community groups. And so am I.

We are committed to keeping our community safe for everyone.

For help scheduling a presentation, contact Communications Manager James Lynch at (253) 798-6265, jlynch@co.pierce.wa.us.

Mark Lindquist is our Pierce County prosecutor. A career prosecutor with more than 20 years of service in the office, he was appointed in 2009, elected in 2010 and reelected in 2014.