



ELDER ABUSE CAN SHORTEN A LIFE

By Denise Nelesen, County's Aging & Independence Services

Elder abuse can shorten someone's life. An older adult's risk of dying more than doubles if he/she is abused physically, emotionally, financially or through withdrawal of care, according to researchers. And when seniors neglect themselves, their risk of dying increases six-fold.

These findings were reported in the Aug. 5 issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association.

The inability to care for oneself, which characterizes self-neglect, can include failing to provide adequate food, water, clothing, shelter and necessary medications and not following basic hygiene practices. Abuse can include physical or sexual abuse, confinement, emotional abuse, caregiver neglect, deprivation or financial exploitation.

The study's author, Dr. XinQi Dong, an associate professor of medicine at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago, and his colleagues followed a group of 9,318 Chicago residents. All were older than 65 and were participating in the Chicago Health and Aging Project. During the study period, from 1993 to 2005, social service agencies received reports of self-neglect on 1,544 participants, and 113 were reported as being abused. During seven years of follow-up, 4,306 of the participants died.

The researchers found that elder self-neglect was associated with a 5.82 times increased risk for mortality in the year after a report of self-neglect. For abused seniors, the chance that they would die in the year after the abuse was reported was more than twice as great as it was for seniors who were not abused.

Dong said the researchers controlled the data to account for numerous factors — such as medical conditions, socioeconomic status, health habits and memory — but still found a strong association between abuse and self-neglect and the risk for premature death.

That suggests, he said, that it's the abuse and self-neglect that lead to the physical decline that ends in death.

Anyone who suspects that an older family member, neighbor or friend is being abused or might be self-neglecting need to report those suspicions to Adult Protective Services. A sudden change in weight, hygiene, or worsening medical con-

ditions, such as being more short of breath, are clues that people might be neglecting themselves. Abuse can be harder to detect, but any unexplained bruises or sudden change in doctors could be clues.

Possible signs of financial abuse can include more telephone, mail and even in-person solicitations. Or, if older people start running out of money when they never did before or things are suddenly missing from their home, they could be in trouble.

The Elder Abuse Reporting Line is (800) 510-2020 and is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

If You Think an Elder is in Trouble, Call for HELP

If you suspected that your elderly neighbor was being taken advantage of by a grandson, would you: A) Do something to help your neighbor; or B) Mind your own business?

People would probably say they'd do "A," but most end up doing "B." They aren't being heartless. As a culture that respects individual privacy, we tend not to get involved in someone's situation unless the person asks for help. Beyond that, many people don't know whom to call to investigate. Others fear for their own well being if they do step in, or worry that it will hurt their relationship with the neighbor.

There is a "safe" way to put your mind at ease. The County has a toll-free phone number to call to report your concerns: (800) 510-2020. Your identity as the reporting party will never be divulged to your neighbor. A trained Adult Protective Services (APS) social worker will visit your



neighbor, talking with him/her away from the grandson, and will assess if there might be a problem in the household that could be considered some form of elder abuse.

Maybe the social worker will find out that your neighbor is giving the grandson a lot of money or other gifts, but that the neighbor is competent and is doing it willingly. Or maybe the social worker will find out that the grandson is intimidating your neighbor and is using undue influence to take her money and possessions. Either way, your mind will be more at peace for having a professional look into the situation.

Elder abuse takes many forms: physical, emotional, sexual, financial, neglect or abandonment, isolation or abduction. Many APS cases involve more than one type of abuse. And, most commonly, family members are the abusers. With your elderly neighbor, the grandson might be forcing her to write checks for him, intimidating her, maybe even hurting her physically. But you may never actually see any direct harm coming to the woman.

Instead you could see other clues that she might be a victim of abuse, such as the woman being agitated or depressed, the grandson restricting your access to her, she's losing weight, or you see a change in her hygiene and personal appearance. Usually there are several signs of trouble. There could be other explanations for these changes, but wouldn't you want to put your mind at rest?

You don't have to wait to be absolutely sure there's a problem before reporting your suspicions of elder abuse. Just call and describe what you're noticing that causes you to suspect trouble. People are protected from civil and criminal liability if they make a report of elder abuse in good faith.

The general public is not required to report elder abuse, but there are

mandated reporters among social, health and law enforcement professionals, plus the clergy and caregivers. Mandated reporters can suffer penalties for not reporting elder abuse, including jail for up to six months or/and a fine up to \$1,000. Penalties increase if the victim suffers great bodily harm or dies as a result of abuse that went unreported.

The elder abuse reporting line is available seven days a week, 24 hours a day. Mandated reporters are required to fill out and send in a form (SOC 341) within 48 hours of making the verbal report.

Unfortunately, once you've made a report, you may not discover what transpires because APS has strict confidentiality requirements. The social workers can't disclose personal information about the family to the person who reported suspected abuse. If you're a neighbor, you might see someone visiting the family, or later see an improvement in the situation, but unfortunately you won't be kept in the loop unless your neighbor shares with you what's happening.

Making a report to APS does not necessarily mean that law enforcement and/or prosecution will be involved. In many situations, legal measures are unnecessary. Sometimes another family member can be brought in to handle the problem. Or bringing help into the home, such as money management assistance or home care, can make enough of a difference to alter an abusive situation.

You should be aware that even competent elderly persons make what others think are bad decisions. Your neighbor's grandson may indeed be taking advantage of her, but if she knows what he's doing and she still wishes to indulge him, there's nothing that can be done. People can, and do, refuse help from APS workers.

Self-neglect is also a form of elder abuse. If your neighbor who lives alone appears to be changing dramati-

cally mentally and/or seems to be having trouble taking care of himself/herself, report the situation.

If you have any suspicion of self-neglect, or elder abuse by others, contact the County's Aging & Independence Services, which oversees APS, at (800) 510-2020.

Pilot Project To Aid Hispanic Seniors

A team comprised of staff from Aging & Independence Services, Behavioral Health Services, Public Health Services and community partners, has designed a Salud (health) pilot program as part of an Hispanic Elder Project. The goal is to provide the most effective, cost-efficient means to help older Hispanic adults who have both diabetes and depression.

Salud outreach professionals will provide culturally appropriate health education, and will ensure the patients receive the care they need, including community resources.

The initial phase of the pilot, running through December, trains mid-level health professionals and promotoras (community health workers) to provide care management. Phase II, to begin early next year, will involve workers at two identified sites simultaneously following two different models.

The Elder Hispanic Project was developed following a federal initiative to improve the health of elder Hispanics. As of early August, the County has contracted with San Ysidro Health Center and North County Health Services to provide services. Program evaluations will be conducted by UCSD.

Be a Coach For a Foster Youth

Life Skills Coaches are needed for the WAY (Workforce Academy for Youth) program. The WAY program offers emancipating foster youth a six-month internship with a County agency.

Life Skills Coaches help the teens succeed at the internships, providing positive reinforcement, a listening ear, a sounding board and another viewpoint. Each coach receives a stipend of \$250 per month and is asked to spend three to five hours per week with the youth or on other work related to the program. If interested, contact Diane Hunter, AIS Intergenerational Coordinator, at (858) 495-5769 or diane.hunter@sdcounty.ca.gov.

La Maestra Has Free Mammograms

The La Maestra Family Health Center has partnered with Grossmont Imaging Center in La Mesa to provide free digital mammograms on the third Saturday of each month for uninsured and underinsured, low-income women ages 40 and older. To register or for more information, call Irene Lopez at (619) 972-4185.

Remember to Keep Fighting The Bite

Don't forget about another pest that can make you quite sick. The mosquito-borne West Nile virus is still with us and can be dangerous, even fatal. The risk of complications increases for those over age 50, or who have weakened immune systems. In 2008, 35 people tested positive for locally-acquired West Nile virus in San Diego County.

Precautions include avoiding outdoor activity at dawn and dusk when mosquitoes that transmit the virus are active. When you're outside, use insect repellent with DEET, Picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, or IR3535. Wear long sleeves and pants when outdoors. Ensure that windows and doors have tight-fitting screens without holes or tears; and dump all standing water where mosquitoes could breed.

For more information, call the County's West Nile virus information

line toll free at (888) 551-INFO (4636) or visit www.SDFighttheBite.org.

Games Bridge Two Generations

Pairs of seniors and youngsters will toss balls and run their hearts out as they compete in Intergenerational Games this Fall in South Bay. Active older adults are encouraged to participate and register now. There is no cost. The goal is to bring youngsters and seniors together to promote healthy, active lifestyles. The pairs face a number of physical and mental challenges, and everyone wins. The South Bay Intergenerational Games will be held from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 18, at the U.S. Olympic Training Center, 2800 Olympic Parkway in Chula Vista. To register for this event or for more information, call (858) 495-5769 or email diane.hunter@sdcounty.ca.gov.

Time For Seasonal Flu Shot

With all the talk about H1N1 (swine flu), we can't forget to prepare for the seasonal flu. In fact, older adults appear to have some immunity against H1N1 and will not need to be at the front of the lines to receive that vaccine. However, seasonal influenza can be a killer for seniors.

Seasonal flu vaccinations are now available and older adults should put this on their to-do list, and you might want to add the pneumonia vaccine. To locate a flu clinic near you, call 211 or visit www.sdiz.org/flu.

PHYSICAL AND FINANCIAL SELF-DEFENSE

Learn to defend yourself from being attacked physically or financially by attending one of our award-winning "Senior Expo: Protect Yourself & Your Wallet" events. Karate black belt Mary Davis shows how to avoid trouble and what to do if you are physically attacked. Representatives from the District Attorney's Office and Adult Protective Services alert you to scams and fraud. The schedule:

Oct. 20 (Tuesday) at the San Marcos Community Center, 3 Civic Center Dr., San Marcos 92069.

Nov. 19 (Thursday) at the George L. Stevens Senior Community Center, 570 S. 65th St. (off Skyline Dr.), San Diego 92114.

Dec. 4 (Friday) at the Lakeside Community Center, 9841 Vine St., Lakeside 92040. Different time: 1 to 3:30 p.m.

Jan. 11 (Monday) at the County Library, Lemon Grove Branch, 8073 Broadway, Lemon Grove 91945.

Feb. 25 (Thursday) at County Library, Imperial Beach Branch, 810 Imperial Beach Blvd, Imperial Beach 91932.

March 24 (Wednesday) at County Library, Valley Center Branch, 29200 Cole Grade Rd., Valley Center 92082.

April 16 (Friday) at the Coronado Public Library, 640 Orange Ave., Coronado 92118.

All events (except for Dec. 4) run from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. with lunch provided. To RSVP, call (800) 510-2020 and press "4." Leave your name, phone number, plus which date/location you want.

50+ Learning Frum in November

A Learning forum geared for older adults who seek to find work, change jobs or improve their work skills will be held from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 7, at the Educational Cultural Complex, 4343 Ocean View Blvd., San Diego 92113. Registration begins at 8 a.m.

This free event, sponsored by AARP and the San Diego Mature Workforce Committee, will have several different speakers and breakout sessions, a technology demonstration, plus exhibitors from various learning institutions.

To register, call the AARP reservation line at (877) 926-8300. For more information about the event, see www.LearningForumSD.org.