Risk Factors for Elder Abuse

RISK FACTORS FOR BECOMING A VICTIM

Functional dependence or disability
  Poor physical health
  Cognitive impairment/dementia
  Poor mental health
Low income/socio-economic status
Social isolation/low social support
Previous history of family violence
Previous traumatic event exposure
Substance abuse

RISK FACTORS FOR BECOMING A VICTIM

Mental illness
Substance abuse
Caregiver stress
Previous history of family violence
Financial dependence on older adult
CONCERNS ABOUT THE HOME ENVIRONMENT

Utilities not working correctly (heating or cooling, water, electricity)
Fecal / urine odor
Empty refrigerator / no evidence of food
Vermin infestation
Extreme clutter / hoarding
Absence of smoke detector
Presence of fire hazard
Broken windows
Expired or unmarked medication bottles or multiple bottles of same medication
CONCERNS ABOUT THE OLDER ADULT / CAREGIVER INTERACTION

Older adult and caregiver provide conflicting accounts of events

Caregiver interrupts/answers for older adult

Caregiver appears unengaged/inattentive in caring for the older adult

Caregiver appears frustrated, tired, angry, or burdened by the older adult

Caregiver appears overwhelmed by the older adult

Caregiver appears to lack knowledge of the patients care needs

Evidence that the caregiver and/or older adult may be abusing alcohol or illicit drugs
CONCERNS FROM THE MEDICAL HISTORY

Unexplained injuries
Past history of frequent injuries
Elderly patient referred to as “accident prone”
Delay between onset of medical illness or injury and seeking medical attention
Recurrent visits to the ED for similar injuries
Using multiple physicians and EDs for care rather than one primary care physician ("doctor hopping or shopping")
Noncompliance with medications, appointments, or physician directions
### Identifying Elder Abuse

#### In a Healthcare Setting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHYSICAL SIGNS</th>
<th>SUSPICIOUS FOR POTENTIAL ELDER ABUSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PHYSICAL ABUSE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruising in atypical locations</td>
<td>SEXUAL ABUSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patterned injuries</td>
<td>Genital, rectal, or oral trauma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrist or ankle lesions or scars</td>
<td>Evidence of sexually-transmitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burns</td>
<td>diseases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple fractures or bruises of difference ages</td>
<td>NEGLECT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traumatic alopecia or scalp hematomas</td>
<td>Cachexia/malnutrition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subconjunctival, vitreous, or retinal ophthalmic hemorrhages</td>
<td>Dehydration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intraoral soft tissue injuries</td>
<td>Pressure sores/decubitus ulcers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### DIFFERENCES FROM FALL-PATTERN INJURIES*

- Injuries to left side of face, peri-orbital area
- Injuries to neck
- Injuries to ears

*In preliminary research, these accidental injury patterns have been shown to be more common in victims of physical elder abuse than in accidental falls.*
Identifying Elder Abuse:

In a Healthcare Setting

QUESTIONS TO EVALUATE FOR POTENTIAL ELDER ABUSE

**GENERAL**
- Do you feel safe where you live?
- Are you afraid of anyone where you live?
- Who assists you if you need help?
- Who makes your meals?
- Who helps you take your medications?
- Who manages your checkbook?
- Do you have frequent arguments with your family or caregiver?
- What happens when you argue?

**PHYSICAL ABUSE**
- Have you been hit, slapped, or kicked?
- Have you ever been locked in a room?
- Have you ever been tied down?
- Have you ever been forced to eat?

**SEXUAL ABUSE**
- Has anyone ever touched you sexually without your consent?

**PSYCHOLOGICAL OR EMOTIONAL ABUSE**
- Do you feel alone?
- Are you yelled at where you live?
- Has your family or caregiver ever threatened to punish you or have you put in an institution?

**NEGLECT**
- Are you left alone often at home?
- Do you need to use hearing aids, glasses, dentures, or a walker or a cane? Are they readily accessible to you?
- Does your family or caregiver ever fail to help you when you need help?
- Do you have difficulty getting access to your medications?

**FINANCIAL OR MATERIAL ABUSE**
- Has anyone ever taken anything from you without asking?
- Have you been forced to sign a will, power of attorney, or any documents that you did not understand?
- Does your family or caregiver rely on you for housing or financial support?