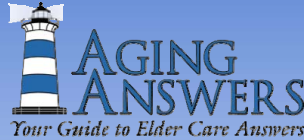


Fall
2009

The Illuminator



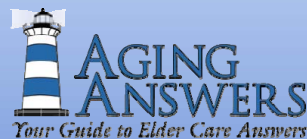
Laurel
Felsenfeld,
BSN RN CRRN CCM

Aging Answers' Services:

- **Assessment** — to identify needs & support system
- **Referrals** — to services that best meet the client's needs, budget, personality and our high standards
- **Coordination** — arranging, evaluating, and revising the services
- **Transition Assistance** — for moves to assisted living or skilled care
- **Monitoring** — 24/7 on call support

Meet the Founder!

Laurel Felsenfeld, company founder and president, is a certified rehabilitation RN and case manager in practice since 1990 with personal experience from family members affected by Alzheimer's and multiple sclerosis. **2009 Recipient of the Oakland University Nightingale Award for Excellence in Community Nursing**



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Elder Abuse: a growing problem

Know the warning signs and where to get help

As the population ages and care needs increase so does the risk of elder abuse. It is estimated 2.1 million seniors are abused in the U. S. each year, but that is likely only a fraction of actual incidence because the majority of cases go unreported and is on the rise due to stress from the current economic conditions. Elder abuse can be physical, emotional, neglect, and financial. Often it is a combination. While families fear physical or sexual abuse by hired caregivers in facilities, most incidents occur in the home and the perpetrator is almost always someone known to the victim, usually a spouse or adult child.

In my experience as a home health care nurse and today as a geriatric care manager, I find it is a caregiving spouse or adult child that becomes "burned out" and takes out frustration by handling her roughly, demeaning comments in her presence, shaming for incontinence, etc. The perpetrator often doesn't realize she is abusive, or, if she does, later feels remorse, apologizes, and enters a 'honeymoon' period showering the victim with gifts and attention such that the victim denies there was abuse.

Signs of physical abuse: Bruises or grip marks around the arms or neck. Marks/welts on the wrists, forearm, upper arms, and/or ankle. Repeated unexplained injuries. Dismissive attitude or statements about injuries. Refusal to go to same emergency department for repeated injuries. Sexual abuse signs: Unexplained

vaginal or anal bleeding. Torn or bloody underwear. Bruised breasts. Venereal diseases or vaginal infections. Fearful of specific caregiver or gender.

Emotional abuse is the most difficult to detect, because it can look like depression or progression of dementia: Uncommunicative and unresponsive. Fearful or suspicious. Lack of interest in social contacts. Evasiveness.

Neglectful abuse is withholding of food, water, hygiene, or medical attention: bedsores, fever, foul odor to urine, dehydration (sunken eyes, dry mouth and skin, listless, scant dark urine), weight loss.

In financial abuse, a caregiver (hired, or family member) exerts undue influence on the client and takes advantage of the victim financially, sometimes even stealing the victim's identity to commit fraud (see Illuminator Spring 2009). A common financial abuse scenario I call "parasitic child syndrome": an adult child unable (often due to undiagnosed mental illness or substance abuse) or unwilling to be self-supporting lives in his parent's home, off of her income, isolates her from the rest of the family and the outside world, and uses her money to support a drug or alcohol habit instead of paying household bills and maintaining the property. Watch out for a caregiver that is overly solicitous towards you/your loved one when you visit, your loved one voices very strong dependence on the caregiver, refuses to discuss unusual cash

withdrawals or checks made out to the caregiver, there is unusual amount of dirty dishes, clothing that doesn't belong to caregiver or client, more groceries than needed, caregiver makes areas 'off limits' to you, many 'wrong number' calls, your loved one gives 'loans' or expensive gifts to the caregiver (in excess of usual holiday giving), caregiver threatens to quit/withhold services if demands are not met, large long-distance or overseas telephone bills, packages delivered to the home in the client's name from sources unlikely to be the client's. I once had a 62 yr old disabled single client living in a group home whose caregiver insisted my client ordered \$500 of goods—from Victoria's Secret!

If you believe an older adult to be the victim of abuse, neglect or exploitation, you can report your suspicions or concerns to the Michigan Vulnerable Adult Help Line 24 hours a day, 7 days / week at 800-996-6228.

From the American Psychological Association <http://www.apa.org/pi/aging/eldabuse.html> and content by Laurel Felsenfeld BSN RN CRRN CCM.



Next Issue: I'm Not Merry, Mary
Depression and Suicide in the Elderly