



D44 An Overview of Elder Abuse With Assessment Tools for Medical and Law Enforcement Personnel

Susan K. Niedbalski, Nicole A. Wall, MFS, and Mark Schlueter, PhD, College of Saint Mary, Department of Biology, 7000 Mercy Road, Omaha, NE 68106; and Gary Lacey, JD, Lancaster, Nebraska County Attorney, 575 South 10th Street, Lincoln, NE 68508*

After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the fundamentals of elder abuse, the characteristic patterns of injury consistent with the pathology of the human body in the aging process, and the necessary assessment tools for the proper identification of elder abuse as opposed to natural injury patterns.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by serving as a reference for the proper assessment of elder abuse by all medical and law enforcement personnel. In addition advocacy for the elder population in the American society will be stressed as to promote their safety.

Elder abuse encompasses a wide array of human mistreatment including emotional abuse, psychological manipulation, neglect and/or abandonment, and financial exploitation. Statistics show that in most cases, the abuse performed is carried out by a loved one or by persons' in which the victim has entrusted. A proper assessment is crucial for two reasons. First, the victim deserves to have the truth heard if a crime was in fact committed. Second, the perpetrator deserves equality and justice until it is determined that they have participated in the crime. Since some cases of elder abuse are misleading due to natural or accidental causes, it may be the case that the suspected perpetrator is innocent of the allegations.

Assessment tools for law enforcement and medical personnel include more than basic visual considerations. The word of the victim is the most considerable tool for assessing a possible crime; however, some victims are fearful to voice their concerns due to the possibility of more severe punishment by the abuser for doing so. It is then up to the investigative personnel to manage the situation for the benefit of the victim. Not only must a thorough physical assessment be completed, but also a psychological exam of both the victim and the accused perpetrator. It is also recommended that assessments be completed also upon the possibility of elder abuse. Data suggests that a personal interview of the possible perpetrator will ensure the physical and psychological safety for both parties involved by recognizing the possibility of a crime before it is committed.

Research on the topic of elder abuse will be gathered with the assistance of government officials and medical personnel familiar with the subject. Cases of elder abuse will be profiled to help identify a number of trends. First, a regional comparison within the state of Nebraska on elder abuse in small rural communities versus large cities will be examined to possibly provide helpful resources to other demographical areas of the country. This research will compare reported cases of elder abuse between different levels of population density to observe both similarities and differences in the likelihood of the crime based upon population concentration. Second, the circumstances surrounding the crimes will be compared to the injury patterns found. This information will assist law enforcement and medical personnel in determining criminal activity as opposed to an accidental death. The physical aspect of violence against the elderly, including obvious bodily harm and sexual assault, must be carefully assessed in order to determine whether the pattern of injury is accidental or inflicted by a second party. The natural aging process must also be taken into consideration upon physical assessment so as to not confuse normal physiological changes with the pathophysiological aspects of injury pattern in the elderly. Finally, trends will be compared surrounding the personal lives of the

victims' within the cases studied. These trends will be comprised of personal relationships, personal demographics, and lifestyle aspects. This will serve as an interpersonal assessment tool for all personnel assisting elderly persons at risk for abuse by giving situational data to assess for in the future.

Elder, Abuse, Assessment