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### W24 Elder Abuse and Neglect: What's Happening to Grandma?

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After attending this presentation, attendees will: (1) recognize the different forms of Elder Abuse (EA); (2) understand the motivation behind EA; (3) identify specific types of trauma found in EA; (4) recognize the injuries that may mimic trauma in the elderly; (5) understand the process of law enforcement response and death investigation in EA; and, (6) distinguish the similarities and differences between intentional neglect and self-neglect.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by increasing the ability to detect the different forms of EA, distinguish abuse from neglect, and increase the awareness of the law enforcement response in cases of criminal abuse and death investigation.

The elderly, defined as those more than 65 years of age, are the fastest growing population in the United States, as well as in other countries around the world. By the year 2030, more than 20% of United States residents are expected to be age 65 and older, compared with 13% in the year 2010. By the year 2034, all of the baby boomers will be more than 70 years of age.

Elder abuse is a growing problem in the United States. Incidents of physical and sexual abuse, as well as neglect, continue to rise as the population ages. Maltreatment of the elderly is associated with increased morbidity and mortality, as well as increased health care costs. Fear, shame, and lack of knowledge contribute to underreporting of elder abuse and put the safety of elders at risk.

Definitions of elder abuse differ across the United States, as well as country to country, but usually include physical and financial abuse, verbal and emotional abuse, and neglect or potential neglect. Elder mistreatment can include both deliberate action or lack of action by a caregiver or family member and can occur in institutional or domestic settings.

It is this lack of agreement on the definition of elder abuse, as well as what constitutes elder abuse, that has made it difficult to assess incidence and prevalence. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), elder abuse is a single or repeated act, or lack of an appropriate action, that occurs in any relationship in which there is an expectation of trust and causes distress or harm to the older person. This definition excludes random acts of criminal behavior or violence, and it puts the trusting relationship at the center of the issue. It is this trusting relationship that often puts any resulting injuries into question, when physical signs of abuse are taken for the expected signs of aging, such as ulcers, bruising, or accidents, such as a fall. Injuries may be mistaken for result of disease or medication, and the possibility of abuse usually isn't considered.

In the 30 years since elder abuse was first identified as "granny battering," the medical and legal communities have come together to investigate elder abuse and add to the scientific knowledge in identification and intervention. Medical costs associated with violent injuries to elders in the United States are estimated at \$5.3 billion dollars annually. This cost, as well as the morbidity and mortality associated with elder abuse, is expected to rise with the growth of the geriatric population.

The ability to identify abuse is the first step in assisting the elderly to safety. This presentation will assist attendees in recognizing the different types of elder abuse, understanding the motivation behind elder maltreatment, and provide specific case examples of abuse and neglect, which will assist the forensic professional in identifying and intervening in elder maltreatment. This presentation also provides tips and techniques for documentation, assists the forensic professional in distinguishing between accidental and criminal acts, and discusses the difficulties in prosecution in EA cases.

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#### Elder Abuse, Neglect, Investigation