FOCUSING ON SENIORS

ELDER ABUSE

World Elder Abuse Day is June 15, 2016 so for June I want to focus on Elder Abuse. Almost daily we read or hear about another case of child abuse or animal abuse, but it seems that elder abuse is not reported as openly as those other two areas. The National Center for Elder Abuse (NCEA) reports that every year an estimated five million elderly people are victims of abuse, neglect or exploitation and that for every case that is reported, 23 cases go unreported. What sad commentary on our society!

Elder abuse is defined as intentional acts that may lead to the harm of a vulnerable elder. And who are the abusers? Abusers can be spouses, children, other family members, friends, trusted professionals and even strangers. Abuse can happen to anyone – even you. So, what are the types of abuse?

- **Physical Abuse** is the use of force to physically injure an elderly person. It can include such things as hitting, slapping, pushing or pinching. Force feeding, physically restraining, failure to provide glasses, hearing aids, dentures or taking them away from an elderly person are also considered abuse. It is not considered abuse if an elderly person decided on his/her own not to make use of glasses, hearing aids or dentures.
- **Emotional Abuse** is the use of verbal threats, isolation, belittling or anything that can cause mental distress to an elderly person. Treating an elderly person as a baby, scolding them for soiling their pants or isolating them from others and not providing any external stimuli are examples of emotional abuse.
- **Sexual Abuse** is sexual contact that is forced or coerced since the elderly person has not given or cannot give his/her consent.
- **Financial Abuse** is taking advantage of an elderly person to gain control over the finances or resources of the person for one's own personal gain. Misrepresenting services or charging for services that were not contracted for or performed is considered abuse. Forcing elderly people to sign for things that have not been thoroughly explained to them or they are unable to repeat back to demonstrate that they understand the situation is abuse. Many elderly people have some form of dementia and their ability to connect the dots of the conversation can be quite difficult.
- **Neglect** is a caregiver's failure to provide for the elderly person's health and well-being. Neglect includes withholding meals, failure to offer water or have any liquid available to drink, putting necessary aides (such as a cane, walker or wheelchair) out of reach. Failure to provide baths, showers, dental care or nail care is also considered neglect.

HOW CAN YOU PROTECT YOURSELF FROM ABUSE, NEGLECT OR EXPLOITATION?

- If managing your finances is becoming more difficult for you, have a trusted friend or relative assist you.
- Use direct deposit.

- Have your estate plan in place. Set up a POLST, a revocable trust, a DPAHC, POA. (These were mentioned in an earlier article of mine).
- Learn about the warning signs of abuse.
- Get on the National Do Not Call Registry to reduce telemarketing calls. Visit **www.donotcall.gov** or call **888-382-1222.**
- If you are offered a prize that sounds too good to be true, most likely it is.
- Do not make immediate decisions. Let others know you will think about it and get back to them.
- Do not sign any documents unless you completely understand them and have talked with someone else about them.
- Do not provide your social security number, credit card number, etc. to anyone over the phone unless you initiated the call.
- Tear up or shred credit card receipts, bank statements or any financial records before putting them in the trash.
- If you need personal help, such as in-home assistance, make sure that helper has been thoroughly screened and that a background check has been completed.
- Have a system in place to call a friend daily or vice versa. That way, should something happen, someone is checking on you on a regular basis.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE WARNING SIGNS OF ABUSE OR NEGLECT?

- Slap marks, unexplained bruises or skin tears.
- Filth, body odor, untrimmed nails, unkempt hair, or wearing the same clothes day after day.
- Withdrawal from social activities, changes in behavior, unanswered phone calls, drapes or blinds that remain closed.
- Bruises around the breasts or genital area.
- Altered documents, such as wills or trusts.
- Unusual withdrawals from a bank account.
- Large checks written to unknown or questionable sources.
- Furniture or jewelry missing that cannot be explained.
- A blank stare when normally there is a smile or an acknowledgement of your presence.

WHAT DO YOU DO IF YOU SUSPECT ABUSE OR NEGLECT?

- Don't assume someone has already reported a suspicious situation. It is better to have a couple of people make a report than no one.
- Call the Adult Protective Agency in the area. The toll free number is: 1-800-551-3191. You do not have to prove that abuse or neglect is happening, the professionals will investigate your concerns.
- If you or someone else is in immediate danger call **9-1-1.**

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PREVENT ABUSE OR NEGLECT?

- Report any concerns you might have to the local authorities or Adult Protective Services.
- Maintain contact with your friends, as isolation can be an indication of abuse or neglect. It will also give your friends an opportunity to talk with you about any problems they may be having.
- Offer to provide respite for a caregiver, whether it is for an hour or a day. Sometimes just a little break is all the caregiver needs to be refreshed with new energy to deal with the one being cared for.
- Volunteer for programs that involve seniors. That way you are hearing and seeing what is going on and it may provide you with an opportunity to help. *Meals on Wheels* is a good program to get to know the elderly, see their environment and be able to notice any changes that might be of a concern.

The elderly of our society should be treated with honor and dignity. *RESPECT the elderly because one day you will grow old, become weak and will expect others to show YOU respect (author unknown).*