

# The Growing Concern of Elder Abuse

Page Ulrey

National Association of Women Judges

38<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference

October 6, 2016

# King County Prosecutor's Office Elder Abuse Project

- Formed in 2001 to prosecute cases of elder financial exploitation, neglect, sexual assault, and homicide
- Trains first responders, medical community, and public
- Works to improve systemic response to elder abuse

# Some Things We've Learned About Elder Abuse

# It Comes in Many Forms

- Physical/Emotional Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Neglect/Abandonment\*
- Financial Exploitation\*

# Common Methods of Elder Financial Exploitation

- Scams by strangers who target vulnerable elders
- Embezzlement by those legitimately in control of elder's assets
  - Powers of attorney, guardians, accountants, bill payers, financial advisers, brokers
- Unauthorized takings by those with access to elder's checks, debit and credit cards
- Undue influence by stranger or trusted other

84% of elder abuse is committed by the elderly victim's relative, most often the victim's adult child.

-U.S. Administration on Aging

# It is a Growing Crisis

- \$18 Trillion or more will move between the generations in the next 20 years
- 10,000 people turn 65 every day and will do so during the next 17 years
- 10% will be victims of elder abuse
- 20% will be victims of financial exploitation

# It is Underreported



For every one case  
that is reported,

**1**

another twenty-three cases  
never come to light.

**23**



# Victims Often Don't Report Due to:

- Fear of losing independence
- Fear of retaliation by perpetrator
- Lack of knowledge or disbelief that exploitation is occurring
- Emotional dependence on perpetrator
- Dementia

# Victims Are Often:

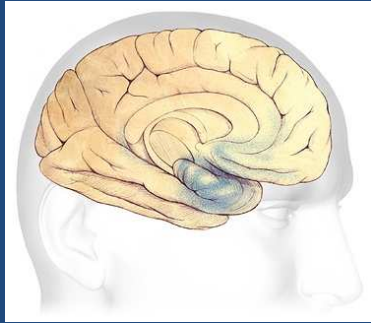
- Men
- Grieving (loss of partner or spouse)
- With health problems
- Confused
- Lonely, isolated
- Suffering from mild to moderate dementia

# Older Victims with Dementia

- May be unable to recognize abuse
- May be unable to report abuse
- May be the perpetrator of abuse
- May not be believed

Almost 50% of people with dementia  
experience some form of abuse.

Cooper, C., Selwood, A., Blanchard, M., Walker, Z.,  
Blizard, R., & Livingston, G.



# Early Alzheimer's Disease

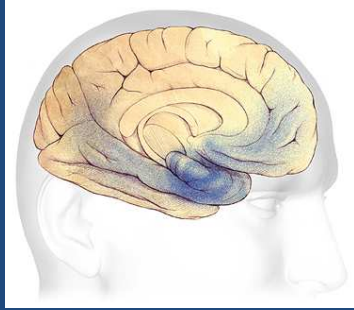
## Symptoms:

- Short-term memory loss
- Word loss
- Judgment impairment

**Financial Abuse**

# Financial Capacity

- One of the first abilities to decline as cognitive impairment and early dementia occur
  - Triebel et al, 2009
- Declining skills are often detectable before a diagnosis of dementia
- PCPs frequently miss declining capacity in patients due to:
  - Lack of training
  - Use of inadequate screening tools (MMSE)

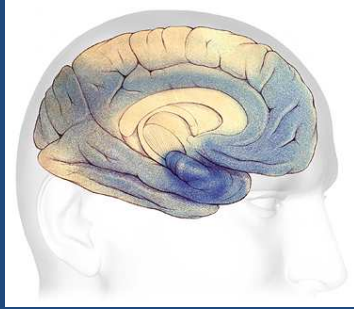


# Mid Alzheimer's Disease

## Symptoms:

- Behavior changes
- Loss of Insight

**Physical abuse**



# Severe Alzheimer's Disease

## Symptoms:

- Loss of ability to communicate
- Loss of mobility
- Swallowing impairment

**Neglect and  
Sexual Abuse**



# We Face Many Challenges in Prosecuting It

- Lack of reporting by mandatory reporters and community
- Lack of adequate training of law enforcement, prosecutors and Adult Protective Services on:
  - Recognizing neglect and financial exploitation
    - Common misperception that abuse of Power of Attorney is civil, not criminal
  - Recognizing and understanding cognitive impairment
  - How to investigate, prove case when victim has dementia or is deceased

# We Face Many Challenges in Prosecuting It

- Lack of experts to:
  - Conduct capacity evaluations of victims
  - Advise us on medical aspects of neglect, abuse cases
  - Conduct forensic accounting of financial records
- Lack of specialization of prosecutors, detectives

# It is Devastating

Even mild abuse, neglect, or exploitation increase premature deaths in the elderly by 300%.

- Mark Lachs, MD

# Feel Free to Contact Me

Page Ulrey

[page.ulrey@kingcounty.gov](mailto:page.ulrey@kingcounty.gov)

(206)477-1943

\*Thanks to Laura Mosqueda, MD