The Intersection of Elder Abuse and Caregiving

Despite their enormous contributions, caregivers receive little support or education to prepare them for the daunting task of caring for older adults with cognitive impairments (e.g., dementia), psychological issues (e.g., depression, paranoia) and multiple chronic conditions (e.g., diabetes, hypertension, arthritis). Less than 20% of caregivers report having received training on how to be a caregiver. Caregivers often feel as if their needs are invisible to physicians, health systems, and policy makers.

It is any wonder then, that two studies show that as many as 47% of family caregivers of people with dementia are more inclined to engage in abusive behavior? (3),(8) Despite their enormous contributions, caregivers receive little support or education to prepare them for the daunting
task of caring for older adults with cognitive impairments (e.g., dementia), psychological issues (e.g., depression, paranoia) and multiple chronic conditions (e.g., diabetes, hypertension, arthritis). Less than 20% of caregivers report having received training on how to be a caregiver. Caregivers often feel as if their needs are invisible to physicians, health systems, and policy makers.

Who are Caregivers?
Informal caregivers can be relatives, spouses, partners, friends, or neighbors who have significant relationships with, and who provide a broad range of assistance to, older adults or adults with disabilities. Although most caregivers provide care for free, some are reimbursed through the In

Promote the use of caregiver assessments to identify and respond to high-risk situations. Caregiver assessment refers to a systematic process of gathering information about caregiving situations to identify caregivers’ strengths, problems, and needs. Assessments should ask questions that yield information related to the warning signs of abuse and neglect. California could require that Title III-Family Caregiver Support Programs develop a uniform performance-based assessment tool for counties to ensure a higher level of uniformity.

Increase funding for California Caregiver Resource Centers and Caregiver Programs sponsored by the Area Agencies on Aging to provide education and support to reduce symptoms of anxiety, burden, and depression, and all of which are warning signs of abuse or neglect.

Hold abusive caregivers accountable. In some instances, caregivers provide care for the wrong reasons. Some

Conclusion
Older Americans are the fastest growing segment of the population, and California is home to the largest number of older adults in our country. Let’s celebrate the spirit of caregivers whose giving of themselves without expectation of recognition or remuneration helps thousands of elders stay in the community. We support them and through them support older adults in California to enjoy their golden years with dignity and respect in the Golden State.

For more information, please contact the California Elder Justice Coalition at info@elderjusticecal.org. Or visit our website at elderjusticecalifornia.org.

References

Taking Action to Prevent Abuse by Caregivers
The California Elder Justice Coalition (CEJC) believes that California can lead the way in supporting caregivers. CEJC’s Blueprint for Improving California’s Response to Elder Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation calls for the following:

1. Know the signs: The intersection of caregiving and elder abuse is rarely discussed yet deserves attention. Supporting caregivers safeguards and supports the older adults in their care.

2. Design and route a public awareness campaign to help caregivers realize that resources are available, identify as caregivers (many caregivers do not identify with this label), and help them identify the “tripping point” (warning signs for abuse, neglect, or exploitation).

3. Increase funding for California Caregiver Resource Centers and Caregiver Programs sponsored by the Area Agencies on Aging to provide education and support to reduce symptoms of anxiety, burden, and depression, all of which are warning signs of abuse or neglect.

4. Ensure that professionals who work with older adults (e.g., physicians, nurses, social workers, care managers) receive training to help them spot warning signs of elder abuse and how to report it. Training should also be provided to professionals in the elder justice system (e.g., Adult Protective Services, Long-term Care Ombudsman, law enforcement) to educate about programs available to support caregivers.

5. Hold abusive caregivers accountable. In some instances, caregivers provide care for the wrong reasons. Some

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Despite their enormous contributions, caregivers receive little support or education to prepare them for the daunting task of caring for older adults with cognitive impairments (e.g., dementia), psychological issues (e.g., depression, paranoia) and multiple chronic conditions (e.g., diabetes, hypertension, arthritis). Less than 25% of caregivers report having received training on how to be a caregiver. Caregivers often feel as if their needs are invisible to physicians, health systems, and policy makers.

It is any wonder then, that two studies show that as many as 47% of family caregivers of people with memory loss are unable to engage in “abusive behavior” (1)(4). One in ten older Americans are believed to experience abuse each year in the United States, according to the National Institute of Justice. But as few as one in 23 cases are ever reported.(4) Both abuse victims and caregivers are suffering in silence, abuse is preventable, but it requires research, education, advocacy and public awareness. One way to value our caregivers and give them the support and information needed to ease their burden and help them with their responsibilities.

It is clear that by developing caregivers we are putting our older and disabled adults at risk. The California Elder Justice Coalition (CEJC) believes that California can lead the way in supporting caregivers. CEJC’s Blueprint for Improving California’s Response to Elder Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation was not provided, many of these older adults and adults with disabilities would be institutionalized sooner, placing a burden and cost on our nation’s long-term care facilities. Nationally, the estimated costs for these unpaid services are twice what the government spends annually on professional home care and nursing home care combined.(6)

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Taking Action to Prevent Abuse by Caregivers

The California Elder Justice Coalition (CEJC) believes that California can lead the way in supporting caregivers. CEJC’s Blueprint for Improving California’s Response to Elder Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation calls for the following:

- Promote the use of caregiver assessments to identify and respond to high-risk situations. Caregiver assessment refers to a systematic process of gathering information about situations to identify caregivers’ strengths, problems, and needs. Assessments should ask questions that yield information related to the warning signs of abuse and neglect. California could require that Title III - Family Caregiver Support Programs develop a universal performance-based assessment tool for caregivers to use at home.

- Increase funding for California Caregiver Resource Centers and Caregiver Programs sponsored by the Area Agencies on Aging to provide education and support to reduce symptoms of anxiety, burden, depression and resentment, of all who are warning signs of abuse or neglect.

- Hold abusive caregivers accountable. In some instances, caregivers provide care for the wrong reasons. Some professionals in the elder justice system (e.g., Adult Protective Services, Long-term Care Ombudsman, law-enforcement) need education about programs available to support caregivers.

Conclusion

Older Americans are the fastest growing segment of the population, and California is home to the largest number of older adults in our country. Let’s celebrate the spirit of caregivers who give of themselves without expectation of remuneration or recognition helps thousands of older adults in our community. Let us support and them through their struggles and hold caregivers accountable.

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