Sexual Assault in the Elderly Population

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In Plain English…

Sexual Assault is any non-consensual sexual conduct.
Sexual abuse of elderly

**Institutional**
- Disabled by definition
- Abuse by caregivers
- Other residents

**Domestic**
- Abuse by family members
- Domestic violence
- Isolated, physically vulnerable
Perpetrators of the Elderly

- 90% of elderly sexual assault victims are assaulted by someone they know
Physical Changes Associated with Aging

- Skin becomes thinner and more delicate
- Loss of muscle mass and bone mass
- Connective tissue shortens
- Change in joint range
- Cardiovascular and respiratory changes
- Changes associated with aging appear in all body systems
Possible Signs of Sexual Assault

- Bruising on inner thighs
- Unexplained genital or anal bleeding
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Unusual scared or timid behavior
- Depressed, withdrawn behavior
- Sudden changes in personality
- Fear of certain people

[http://seniorjournal.com/NEWS/Eldercare/4-11-09SexualAbuse.htm](http://seniorjournal.com/NEWS/Eldercare/4-11-09SexualAbuse.htm)
74 year old woman

- Pt. reports her handyman of 25 years came to her house requesting an extension cord. As she was going downstairs to get the extension cord assailant was “right behind me coming down the stairs.”

- He yelled at her “you think you’re so smart” and then he “pushed me and shoved me downstairs” and “he held my head down.”

- Then “he forced me to perform oral sex on him.” Assailant left the house around midnight stealing her car, wallet and credit cards and house keys.
Examination Techniques for the Elderly

- Anticipate more hesitancy in giving sexual history, referring to body parts, and using terms the perpetrator may have used.
- Ask about hip and leg pain when positioning pt.
- Drape for modesty.
- Consider pediatric speculum (or no speculum).
- Be prepared for the potential of vaginal bleeding resulting from friable tissue.
- Wet swab with sterile water when taking vaginal swabs, if vagina is dry.
88 year old man

- Brought in by ambulance from a SNF.
- Pt. has Alzheimer’s.
- Pt’s wife states that an aide reported to have found blood all over the floor, on his bedding and underwear.
- Pt. was interviewed - he is not aware that he lives in a SNF, has no recollection of being hurt, has no explanation for the blood found in his room.
Conclusion

• Genital anal exam normal

• Cannot “rule out” sa, but another explanation is possible

• Family facility can be reassured
Barriers to Healing

- Recovery may be a difficult process
- Injuries may take longer to heal
- May increase sense of helplessness
- Social values different
- Decrease in support system of friends and family
- May feel alienated and alone
- Age related mental impairments affect memory for reporting
Any Questions or Comments?
Websites/References

• National Center on Elder Abuse – www.Ncea.aoa.gov/NCEAroot/Main_Site/Index.aspx
• Pennsylvania Department of Aging - www.aging.state.pa.us/aging/cwp/view.asp?a=541&q=252220
• Washington State Adult Abuse and Prevention Program - www.adsa.dshs.wa.gov
• Washington State Legislature on Abuse of Vulnerable Adults – www.apps.leg.wa.gov