

ELDER ABUSE:
Self-neglect can be
a common problem

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are not.

‘It’s their choice’

Steve Hawks, an adult protective service worker through Northwest Senior and Disability Services, is tasked with investigating elder abuse in Clatsop County.

His job is to investigate if an incident occurred, file a report and offer social services to the victim. He works closely with law enforcement and others in his Warrenton office and headquarters in Salem.

He can strongly recommend a victim move into a foster home, assisted-living facility or accept in-home care, but the largest hurdle is that the decision is up to the elderly person.

Unlike child protective services that can remove a child from a home, an adult has the right to make their own decisions. If an adult loses their cognitive ability to decide, it us up to a guardian or conservator.

“I can’t remove an adult from a home under any circumstance. Sometimes I would like to, but I can’t,” Hawks said. “It’s their choice.”

Last year, Clatsop County had 224 reports of elder abuse. Hawks was assigned to investigate 133 of them. Just in January this year, Hawks has already investigated 20 cases.

More than 38,000 elder abuse cases were reported statewide in 2014, up from about 30,000 in 2013.

Hawks said he has not seen an increase in cases, but rather more complicated cases.

“I see more of a trend of complex cases, especially financial exploitation,” he said. “We have a lot of retired seniors here with some wealth. Their cases tend to be more complex.”

Self-neglect

The most common referrals Hawks receives are for cases of self-neglect. The reports usually come from concerned friends, family, Medix personnel or police officers.

Hawks said the perception of self-neglect is being disheveled or not taking baths, but it is actually about cognition. He asks the people if they understand not bathing or having moldy food in their refrigerator can be harmful. Hoarding is another example of self-neglect.

“I had to climb up and into (a hoarder’s house),” Hawks said. “It was not a pleasant experience when I looked at what I crawled through to get to where the person was sleeping in the middle of

everything.”

When a scam is reported, it is assigned to Hawks as self-neglect. Since adults have the right to spend their money any way they wish, scams are not considered financial exploitation.

By investigating a scam as self-neglect, Hawks asks victims if they understand what they are doing. As an example, he will ask if they really think they will receive a check for \$2 million from a lottery they never entered.

The Oregon Department of Justice has been a huge resource in combating scams, Hawks said.

Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum in January hosted a first-ever elder abuse conference, where scams and other barriers were discussed. In addition, the state Legislature is considering funding for Oregon’s first full-time elder abuse prosecutor.

Unfortunately, Hawks said, once an elderly person gets involved in a scam it can become similar to a gambling addiction.

“Even with all of that education, they will continue,” he said. “I wish I could tell you we have had great success with victims of scammers, but I can think of several where they are currently involved in them.”

Financial exploitation

Astoria Police Deputy Chief Eric Halverson said most elder abuse cases in Clatsop County involved scams or other financial exploitation similar to the case in Lake Oswego.

Forgery or fraud calls to Astoria Dispatch have increased from 58 in 2012 to 163 in 2015.

“It’s far more complicated now,” Halverson said. “A person can be anywhere in the world doing this. Actually being able to track it back and get to the source of it is very hard.”

Scams and financial exploitation prey on the victim’s trust. Victims are left feeling embarrassed and ashamed, which can lead to them not wanting to report the crime.

“We see financial crimes more often than we do physical abuse, but that’s not to say there is not physical abuse as well,” Halverson said.

Some detectives and officers around Clatsop County carry a pocket guide for legal issues related to elder abuse. The pocket guide includes definitions for the different types of elder abuse.

Law enforcement is taught to look out for certain types of injuries. A common assault injury to the elderly is black eyes.

In addition, Hawks said, he comes across a sex abuse case once or twice a year.

The Nugget Newspaper Crossword

By Jacqueline E. Mathews, Tribune News Service

- ACROSS**
- 1 Beside the ____; irrelevant
6 Potato peel
10 Tiny computer screen image
14 Concur
15 Roll call response
16 “____ Lisa”; da Vinci painting
17 Treasure ____; valuable cache
18 Eras
19 Overly proper
20 Upper house members
22 In a ____; dazed
24 Flat walking area on a ship
25 “____ are the meek...”
26 Times or Trafalgar
29 Sword fights
30 Umpire’s cry
31 ____-toothed tiger; extinct cat
33 Hollers
37 Dishonest one
39 Invalidates
41 Official stamp
42 Each ____; one another
44 City leader
46 Highest club
47 Opium source
49 Sunbathed
51 Part of a golf course
54 Bride’s headwear
55 Register, as for military service
56 Airport building
60 Related
61 Seldom seen
63 Keep away from
64 Flat wood strip
65 Smell
66 Eggheads
67 Kennedy and others
68 ____ off; dozes
69 Rendezvous
- DOWN**
- 1 Boone & Sajak
2 Meanie
3 Press clothing
4 Western state
5 Wobbles
6 Dangerous fish
7 Beer barrels
8 Indignation
9 ____ Crunch; chocolate bar
10 Stalemates
11 Foot problems
12 In reserve
13 Appointed
21 Pacific or Arctic
23 Depend
25 Husky
26 Fly alone
27 Give up
28 Provo’s state
29 Filibuster
32 Like a road full of potholes
34 Faucet problem
35 Frilly trimming
36 Snow toy
38 Additional book publishings

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Created by Jacqueline E. Mathews 2/17/16

— Last Week’s Puzzle Solved —

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- 40 Not plastered
43 Arguments
45 Clothing
48 Benefactor
50 Dieter’s piece of pie
51 Banquet
52 Joint most often sprained
- 53 Epic by Homer
54 Swerves
56 ____ on; trampled
57 ____ a soul; nobody
58 Tallies up
59 In case
62 “Much ____ About Nothing”

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