



Testimony

Elder Abuse – Providers' Perspective

House Aging and Older Adult Services Committee

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Pennsylvania Homecare Association

Thank you Chairman Hennessey and committee members, for this opportunity to discuss elder abuse in Pennsylvania. As an association representing more than 500 organizations that provide medical care, personal care and end-of-life care to nearly 600,000 individuals in their own homes, our nurses, therapists, social workers, and aides take their responsibility of being mandated reporters of suspected abuse and neglect of care-dependent individuals very seriously.

In keeping with your instruction to limit my remarks to five minutes, I would like to focus on three areas of concern for homecare providers:

Suspected Abuse Reported – Blackout Ensues

A homecare aide sees bruises on the arm of her client. She asks about the bruise, but the client responds that she hit her arm on the counter. The following week, there are more bruises and again, the client dismisses the question. Not only is the aide concerned, she has also witnessed the son raise his voice to his mother about her “not making it to the bathroom in time.”

The aide decides to report the bruise to her supervisor, who after doing some questioning, files a report with the Area Agency on Aging, Protective Services and the Department of Health. Weeks pass, the agency continues to provide care but the agency has no idea of what has happened as a result of its report. When asked, the agency is told that the information is confidential.

While everyone understands and respects the need for confidentiality, it must not become a barrier to ensuring the safety not only of the consumer but also the home care aide, who reported the abuse. Open communication between various providers and other entities must exist in order to serve as well

as protect the rights of our seniors. Sharing of information between the various entities such as the Health Department and Protective Services has the potential to actually improve the quality of life of our seniors.

Another scenario may involve a homecare aide being accused of verbally or physically abusing a client. Again, a report is filed with both the Protective Services Unit and the Department of Health, the state agency that regulate homecare agencies. If this report is substantiated, the aide is terminated, however there is no public record of this case. Therefore, another agency may hire that aide without any knowledge of the abuse.

A registry, similar to the Child Abuse Registry would be very beneficial to prevent this individual from doing this again to another senior.

Infestation – Call it Neglect

Homecare is usually not 24/7 care. Typically, consumers receive 2-4 hours of care three times a week so it is essential that family and/or informal caregivers are involved in the care plan to ensure the consumer is safe and able to live as independently as possible. Homecare agencies stress that we are “guests in people’s homes” and must respect the way someone chooses to live.

Is it okay to have 13 cats, with only one litter box, or to not change bed linens despite frequent accidents? Is it okay to have this (photo) underneath the cushions of a sofa? Roaches and more roaches. This infestation (photographed by a homecare aide) is just one case but there are many others of not just roaches, but bed bugs. Prior to Act 22, the Medicaid Aging Waiver was able to pay for extermination services but now the only way to get help for our seniors is to report the situation as neglect to Protective Services, who in turn may pay for an exterminator using state funds. At a time when state funds are dwindling, why would we eliminate a Medicaid-covered service, which requires a federal match, with a service that is totally funded by state dollars?

Financial Exploitation of Seniors Rising

Agencies also express deep concern with financial exploitation of seniors. According to one homecare provider, this is a problem “that keeps me up at night but how can it be proven? We applaud the Area Agencies on Aging for their initiatives focusing on this issue. The Philadelphia Corporation on Aging and the Allegheny AAA have developed programs with the banking community that raise the awareness of bank tellers of possible exploitation, but much more public awareness is needed to have everyone be on the look-out for possible exploitation.