

ETHICAL CHALLENGES FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS IN MANAGING ELDER ABUSE

Luciana Caenazzo¹ and Sarah Gino²

¹Department of Molecular Medicine, University of Padova, Padova, Italy

²Department of Health Sciences, University of Piemonte Orientale, Novara, Italy

Background

- Elder abuse is a common challenging issues in both developed and developing countries around the world that involves issues such as health, justice, ethics, and human rights.
- Discussion about ethical principles is complex, because they are based on the culture in each society.
- Identifying and reporting the abuse is a challenging issue. Discussion about elder abuse reporting is not limited to the social context, but it necessitates awareness about medication, law execution, and social services. All professionals who have relationships with elderly patients regarding treatment and law execution should assume the ethical responsibility to protect them against harm.

Results

- Intervention in case of elder abuse is accompanied by ethical challenges, because lack of professional principles leads to personal, legal and ethical concerns. Because it could be difficult for members of the care team to perform a successful intervention for an elderly who is willing to stay in the abusive situation or when legal commitments are not consistent with ethical principles.
- Training in recognizing elder abuse have to be organized in order to put the healthcare professionals to have at their disposal the time and methods of assistance that are necessary to ensure an adequate level of expertise in identifying abused elderly person.
- An appropriate standard of medical attention and care in case of abuse today has not yet been definitively established.
- Since awareness of abuse is influenced by knowledge, expertise and preparedness, the competence of health personnel who take care of abused subjects in conducting the examination and evidence collection is of fundamental importance to identify and report mistreatments and support vulnerable populations such as the elderly.

Conclusion

- Healthcare professionals working with elderly patients in abusive and neglectful circumstances, have the challenge to balance the duty to protect the safety of the vulnerable elder with the victim's right to confidentiality and self-determination.
- Like many ethical dilemmas the goal will essentially be to respectfully come to a conclusion which is the least harmful to the vulnerable patient.