

Forensic Markers of Elder Abuse

Laura Mosqueda, M.D.

Director of Geriatrics

Professor of Family Medicine

University of California, Irvine School of Medicine

Caveats

- This lecture is primarily designed for professionals who work with older adults
 - Adult Protective Services workers
 - Health care providers
 - Social workers in the community and health care settings
- Some of the photographs and descriptions will be unpleasant and disturbing
- We'll be focusing on physical abuse and neglect



Center of Excellence
in Elder Abuse and Neglect

University of California, Irvine • Program in Geriatrics • www.centeronelderabuse.org

I've had enough of this:

“That’s not abuse. He’s just old and old people bruise easily.”



Center of Excellence
in Elder Abuse and Neglect

University of California, Irvine • Program in Geriatrics • www.centeronelderabuse.org

and this:

“That’s not abuse. He’s just old and old people fracture easily.”



Center of Excellence
in Elder Abuse and Neglect

University of California, Irvine • Program in Geriatrics • www.centeronelderabuse.org

and this:

“That’s not abuse. He’s just old and old people fall.”



Center of Excellence
in Elder Abuse and Neglect

University of California, Irvine • Program in Geriatrics • www.centeronelderabuse.org

and this:

“That’s not abuse. He’s just old and old people get pressure sores.”



Center of Excellence
in Elder Abuse and Neglect

University of California, Irvine • Program in Geriatrics • www.centeronelderabuse.org

Why the Difficulty?

- Why is it often difficult to tell if physical abuse has occurred?
- Why is it often difficult to tell if neglect has occurred?
 - *Normal* age-related changes
 - *Common* age-related changes
 - *Context* in which an injury (fracture) or wound (pressure sore) or event (grabbed an arm) occurred

The Challenge in Elders

- Normal changes of aging
 - Multiple co-morbidities
- Medication effects
 - Cognitive impairment



Center of Excellence
in Elder Abuse and Neglect

University of California, Irvine • Program in Geriatrics • www.centeronelderabuse.org

Normal & Common Changes

- Integument
 - Thinner epidermis
 - Capillary fragility
- Sensory
 - Presbycusis
 - Slower reaction time
 - Macular degeneration, cataracts
- Renal: Decrease in creatinine clearance



Center of Excellence
in Elder Abuse and Neglect

University of California, Irvine • Program in Geriatrics • www.centeronelderabuse.org

Normal & Common Changes

- Musculoskeletal
 - Decrease in muscle mass (sarcopenia)
 - Decrease in bone density (osteoporosis)
- Function
 - Gait & Balance
 - Driving
 - Handling finances



Center of Excellence
in Elder Abuse and Neglect

University of California, Irvine • Program in Geriatrics • www.centeronelderabuse.org

Dementia and Abuse

- May be unable to recognize abuse
 - May be unable to report abuse
 - May not be believed
-
- People with dementia are especially vulnerable



Center of Excellence
in Elder Abuse and Neglect

University of California, Irvine • Program in Geriatrics • www.centeronelderabuse.org

What are some clues that abuse may have occurred?



Center of Excellence
in Elder Abuse and Neglect

University of California, Irvine • Program in Geriatrics • www.centeronelderabuse.org

History/Interview

- Implausible/vague explanations
- Delay in seeking care
- Unexplained injuries - past or present
- Interaction between patient and caregiver



Center of Excellence
in Elder Abuse and Neglect

University of California, Irvine • Program in Geriatrics • www.centeronelderabuse.org

Clues on Physical Exam

- Sores, bruises, other wounds
- Unkempt appearance
- Poor hygiene
- Malnutrition
- Dehydration



Center of Excellence
in Elder Abuse and Neglect

University of California, Irvine • Program in Geriatrics • www.centeronelderabuse.org

Does the story match the physical findings?



Center of Excellence
in Elder Abuse and Neglect

University of California, Irvine • Program in Geriatrics • www.centeronelderabuse.org



Center of Excellence in Elder Abuse & Neglect
www.centeronelderabuse.org



Center of Excellence in Elder Abuse & Neglect
www.centeronelderabuse.org



Center of Excellence
in Elder Abuse and Neglect

University of California, Irvine • Program in Geriatrics • www.centeronelderabuse.org



Center of Excellence
in Elder Abuse and Neglect

University of California, Irvine • Program in Geriatrics • www.centeronelderabuse.org



Center of Excellence
in Elder Abuse and Neglect

University of California, Irvine • Program in Geriatrics • www.centeronelderabuse.org

Pressure Ulcers

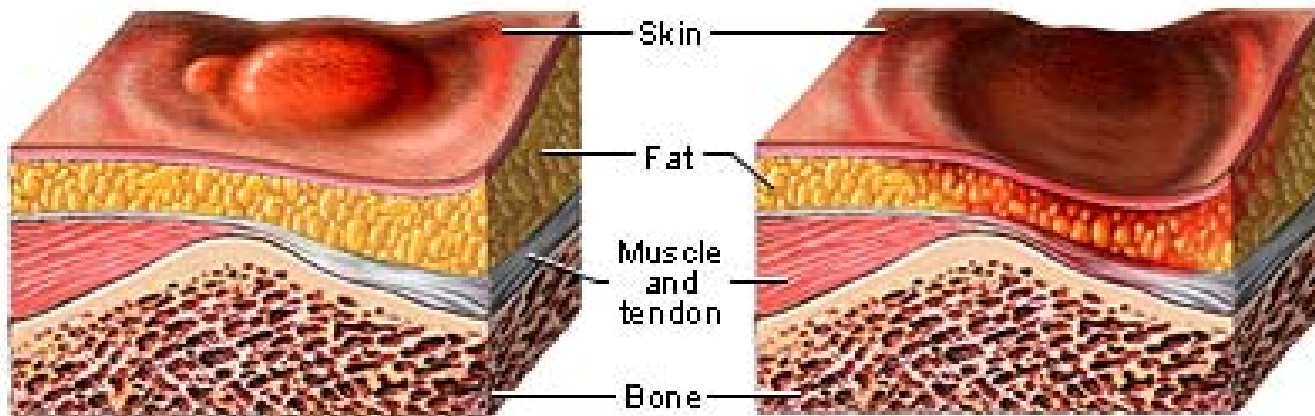
- Can occur despite good care
- Worrisome signs:
 - Not being treated
 - No health care provider has been notified
 - Smelly, dirty
 - Deep
- Stages I through IV



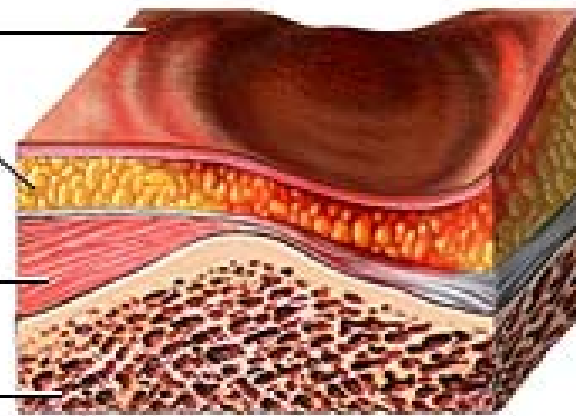
Center of Excellence
in Elder Abuse and Neglect

University of California, Irvine • Program in Geriatrics • www.centeronelderabuse.org

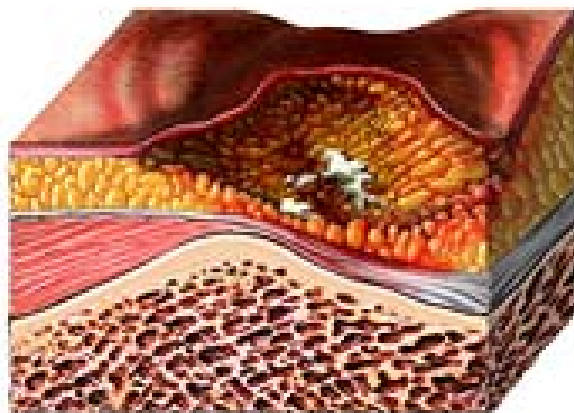
St I



St II



St III



St IV



Center of Excellence
in Elder Abuse and Neglect

University of California, Irvine • Program in Geriatrics • www.centeronelderabuse.org

Laboratory Findings in Abuse (direct and indirect)

- Chemistry panel
 - Malnutrition, Dehydration
 - Electrolyte imbalances
 - Impaired renal (kidney) function
- CBC (complete blood count) with differential
 - Malnutrition
 - Anemia
- Medication levels



Center of Excellence
in Elder Abuse and Neglect

University of California, Irvine • Program in Geriatrics • www.centeronelderabuse.org

The Importance of Context

- All bruises are due to the same thing: a blood vessel ruptures and blood extravasates into the surrounding tissue
- All pressure sores are due to the same thing: there's inadequate blood supply to maintain perfusion of the tissues
- All fractures are due to the same thing: an external force greater than the strength of the bone was applied.



Center of Excellence
in Elder Abuse and Neglect

University of California, Irvine • Program in Geriatrics • www.centeronelderabuse.org

Context (cont'd)

- Our job is to figure out **why** these things happened
- Most of the time, understanding the context is key to making a determination
- Sometimes, though, it's pretty darn obvious and I don't really need to know much about the context!



Center of Excellence
in Elder Abuse and Neglect

University of California, Irvine • Program in Geriatrics • www.centeronelderabuse.org

These are tough issues and we need to be cautious

- Don't want to accuse unfairly
- Don't want to miss an abusive situation and fail to protect a vulnerable person
- We need to ask the right questions and listen with a critical ear to explanations



Center of Excellence
in Elder Abuse and Neglect

University of California, Irvine • Program in Geriatrics • www.centeronelderabuse.org

Center of Excellence on Elder Abuse and Neglect

Visit our web site!

www.centeronelderabuse.org

Wanna talk? Click on “Contact us”



Center of Excellence
in Elder Abuse and Neglect

University of California, Irvine • Program in Geriatrics • www.centeronelderabuse.org