



PATIENT
ABUSE
AND NEGLECT

Hotline: 800-382-1039

WHO WE ARE

The Patient Abuse and Neglect Program is an investigative branch of the Office of the Indiana Attorney General. Staff members of this program investigate cases throughout Indiana. Patient Abuse and Neglect investigators have experience and expertise conducting criminal investigations in institutional settings. Their backgrounds include medicine, investigation and law enforcement.

Specializing in the investigation of patient abuse and neglect in residential care facilities, such as nursing homes, group homes and psychiatric care centers, the Patient Abuse and Neglect Program regularly assists local and federal authorities with prosecution. Patient Abuse and Neglect investigators review abuse or neglect cases to determine whether they should be referred for criminal prosecution. With broad access to patient, staff and institutional records, these professionals work closely with law enforcement officials to determine who should be held responsible for abuse and neglect.

ABUSE AND NEGLECT FACTS

Each year, more than 40,000 cases of elder abuse and neglect occur in Indiana, according to the Office of the Clark County Prosecuting Attorney. On a national level, 2.1 million older Americans are victims, as estimated by the American Psychological Center.

Consider:

- Only one in 14 cases of abuse and neglect is reported, according to an estimate from the Clark County prosecutor.
- Almost 45,000 people age 65 or older lived in Indiana nursing homes in 2000, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
 - Approximately one out of every three U.S. nursing homes was cited for an abuse violation in the two-year period from January 1, 1999 through January 1, 2001, according to the Committee on Government Reform Minority Office, United States House of Representatives.

THE ABUSE AND NEGLECT VICTIMS

- The median age of elder abuse victims is 76.5 years
- The majority of elder abuse victims are female
 - 65.4 percent are white
 - 21.4 percent are black
 - 9.6 percent are Hispanic or Latino
- Less than 1 percent are Native Americans, Asian Americans or Pacific Islanders

THE SIGNS OF PATIENT ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Knowing the signs of abuse and neglect is the first critical step. Each form of patient abuse and neglect has its own identifying characteristics. Patients often exhibit signs that they are suffering from abuse and neglect just as caretakers convey signs that they are committing those acts.

Physical abuse

Physical abuse includes striking or aggressively handling a patient. Patients who show no outward reaction or response to pain may be experiencing repeated acts of physical abuse.

Caretakers who are injuring a patient often try to hide what they have done. An injury that is not immediately reported to a patient's family should raise suspicion. Multiple bruises of a similar shape are often signs of physical abuse. Repeated strikes with objects, such as a belt or electrical cord, usually cause a specific, identifiable kind of bruise. Burns and scalds are also common signs of physical abuse. Caretakers should guarantee that a patient's environment is free from burn risk.

Emotional abuse

Caretakers are not allowed to isolate patients from social interaction with other patients *or* other health care providers. A patient who suddenly becomes passive or withdrawn could be fearful of a caretaker. He or she could have been subjected to physical or verbal abuse at a caretaker's hands and may fear being alone with that particular caretaker. Caretakers usually do not verbally threaten or insult patients in the presence of others; therefore, it is a private, one-on-one problem without witnesses.

Neglect

Many of the effects of patient neglect are not immediately obvious. They can, however, lead to more serious medical problems. Any substantial increases or decreases in a patient's weight should have a legitimate medical explanation. If a patient is observed requesting food immediately following a served meal, he or she could be experiencing problems with food consumption. A caretaker may not notice a patient's frequent inability to take the food from the plate to his or her mouth.

Cleanliness and physical hygiene are also essential to a patient's health. Poor dental care, numerous pressure sores, and torn or dirty clothing are all indicators of patient neglect.

Theft of pain medication

The theft of pain medication is a growing form of patient abuse and neglect. Pain medication is a common element in a patient's environment. A drug-using caretaker may take advantage of this environment and steal pain medication for personal use. Significant changes in the amount of pain medication reportedly administered to a patient can be a sign of theft, and deserves prompt attention.

A drug-seeking caretaker could attempt to hide the theft of pain medication by falsely recording that the drug was given to a patient. A caretaker might attempt to reapply a used or damaged pain patch after removing it from the patient's body for personal use. The caretakers who steal and abuse pain medication often show obvious, serious signs of impairment while working under the influence.

PROSECUTING PATIENT ABUSE AND NEGLECT

The Patient Abuse and Neglect Program has a proven track record. Successful prosecutions have resulted in probation, incarceration and even extradition.

REPORTING

In Indiana, anyone who suspects patient abuse or neglect is legally obligated to report it to a law enforcement agency, Adult Protective Services (800-992-6978), or Child Protective Services (800-800-5556). They are also encouraged to report suspected instances of abuse and neglect to the Indiana Attorney General's Patient Abuse and Neglect group using the hotline **(800-382-1039)** or by reporting it online at www.AttorneyGeneral.IN.gov.



Office of the Indiana Attorney General
Patient Abuse & Neglect Program

8005 Castleway Drive
Indianapolis, IN 46250
1-800-382-1039
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