Quick Guide to Financial Abuse

Financial abuse includes theft, scamming, coercion in relation to an adult’s financial affairs or arrangements, including in connection with wills, property, inheritance, financial transactions, or the misuse or appropriation of property, possessions or benefits (Care Act 2014).

Examples of financial abuse

- Being pressurised to lend money to a relative or friends
- Being charged excessive amounts of money for service
- People frequently requesting small amounts of money from you
- Family members moving into your home without your consent and without a prior agreement on sharing costs
- Pressurising you to sign over your house or property
- Taking money, cashing a cheque or using credit or debit cards without your permission
- Pressurising you into changing a will
- Someone else taking charge of your benefits and not giving you all your money
- Misuse of a power of attorney
- Arranging less care than is needed to save money to maximise inheritance

WHO IS AT RISK?

- Anyone of any age. Those with cognitive impairment are more at risk e.g. people with dementia or a learning disability
- Lonely older people & socially isolated individuals
- Recently bereaved
- Those with poor health
- Those needing help with activities of daily living
- Individuals who are dependent on the abuser
- Can occur within a domestic abuse relationship

WHY IS FINANCIAL ABUSE IMPORTANT TO BE AWARE OF?

GPs and all who work in primary care come into regular contact with patients who may be vulnerable to financial abuse (and other forms of abuse). We are ideally placed to identify patients who may be victims in order to refer to appropriate services.

Consider making an Adult Safeguarding Referral if you suspect that your patient is suffering, or at risk of suffering, financial abuse. You should also consider whether there could be other forms of abuse happening also. Refer to the “Decision Aid for Making an Adult Safeguarding Referral” in the RCGP Safeguarding Adults at Risk of Harm toolkit for further guidance.
WHO PERPETRATES FINANCIAL ABUSE?

- Can be anyone
- Family members are the most reported group
- Care workers
- Perpetrators can be part of organised criminal gangs who operate nationally and internationally

FINANCIAL SCAMMING

- A form of fraud or financial abuse designed to extort money from people using misleading or deceptive ‘selling’ techniques.
- Examples include lottery/prize draw scams, romance scams, charity scams, pension scams

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF FINANCIAL ABUSE?

- Can be catastrophic financially. Victims may be unable to pay their bills or pay their mortgage which may lead to them losing their homes. Victims may become fully dependent on the state.
- Victims may be unable to afford food or heating.
- Victims may experience anxiety, depression, distress, embarrassment, loss of self-esteem, social isolation or loss of independence.

How might I know my patient may be being financially abused? Some of the signs could be:

- Missing possessions
- Unable to afford food, heating, bills when previously able to do so
- Unexplained lack of money or inability to maintain lifestyle
- Disparity between the person’s living conditions and their financial resources e.g. insufficient food in the house
- Unnecessary property repairs or property repairs/work done very poorly
- Someone e.g. family or carer, showing an unusual interest in the assets of the person
- Victims of scams may: have high volume of scam mail, hoard large quantities of ‘worthless’ goods, receive a high volume of phone calls

References and further reading:

- Financial Abuse Evidence Review. November 2015, AgeUK
- Scams Toolkit; A holistic guide to mail fraud. April 2015, National Trading Standards Scams Team
- Financial Scamming; Our Campaign and Research to Date. The National Centre for Post Qualifying Social Work and Professional Practice at Bournemouth University
- At a glance 69: Safeguarding Adults: Types and Indicators of Abuse. January 2015, SCIE

For more information, please visit the Safeguarding Adults at Risk of Harm toolkit at www.rcgp.org.uk/sarh