

## Division of Aging and Adult Services

### Issue Brief – Vulnerable Adult and Elder Abuse Awareness

*Building a Livable and Senior-Friendly North Carolina*

*“Living Wise and Aging Well”*

#### Caretaker Neglect

A substantial amount of reported elder abuse cases are those in which the caretaker responsible for the older adult or adult with a disability fails to provide the necessary services to maintain the individual’s mental or physical health.

The daily demands and responsibilities of caregiving can be extremely stressful and overwhelming. Spouses, children, friends and other adult relatives may become burned out and impatient as the health of the older adult or adult with a disability deteriorates. The following risk factors may lead to caretaker neglect:

- Problems with drugs or alcohol
- History of abuse toward others
- Anger toward the adult for whom care is being provided
- Lack of family support
- Lack of knowledge of mental/physical impairments experienced by the individual for whom care is being provided
- Poor problem-solving skills
- Caretaker reluctance or the feeling of being forced to provide care

Caretaker neglect can occur in the home as well as in residential settings. Common signs of caretaker neglect include:

- Unusual weight loss, dehydration
- Untreated physical issues (bed sores, chronic cough, poor dental hygiene)
- Unsanitary living condition (soiled bed linen and clothing)
- Being left dirty or without a bath
- Unsafe living conditions (no heat, running water, access to telephone)
- Being deprived of food and medication
- Isolation from other family members, friends or other social networks

#### Prevention/Intervention

As a concerned neighbor, friend or person in the community, there are proactive measures to be taken to aid in the reduction of caretaker neglect:

- Call and visit periodically
- Offer to stay with the adult so the caretaker can have a break
- Listen to the caregiver and the adult receiving care
- Educate yourself and others on all signs of elder abuse
- Most importantly, if you suspect abuse, notify your county Department of Social Services

As a caretaker, if you find you are indeed overwhelmed by the demands of caring for a loved one or another individual, the following ideas could help you avoid neglecting to provide care for an adult:

- Request assistance from other friends, relatives, faith-based community, or respite care agencies
- Find an adult day care program
- Obtain counseling for any substance abuse or mental health issues