



GRAND ROUNDS

June 15 marked World Elder Abuse Awareness Day and the RVH Regional Assault Care Program (RACP) is making great strides in empowering seniors to be free from harm. The program educates service providers in the health sector, seniors and their families across Renfrew County about elder abuse. The specially trained nurses with the Renfrew Victoria Hospital's RACP identify that an effective method to recognize and prevent elder abuse is to focus on arming seniors and service providers with knowledge, information and support.

Jennifer Valiquette, Program Manager of the RACP and the Elder Abuse Response Services (EARS) notes that over the past few months there has been a significant increase in referrals to the program, so the need for services in the county is evident. Valiquette says, "Elder abuse is a hidden crime for many seniors because they may fail to recognize the abuse, feel ashamed and embarrassed, fear retaliation and/or institutionalization if they tell someone, and may lack the ability to report the abuse themselves."

EARS nurses focus on assessing seniors at risk, and identifying signs of elder abuse. A senior at risk could be your neighbour, a friend, a family member, or a client. Indicators of abuse can be subtle or very obvious. For example, social isolation—the senior is not allowed to attend church or visit with friends; the senior is denied access to transportation, telephone or money; the senior has visible bruising; or the senior may be confused or drowsy due to over-medication.

This list of indicators is certainly not exhaustive. Valiquette says that "financial abuse is extremely predominant. Seniors may notice a sudden lack of funds or unusually large withdrawals or changes to their bank accounts." An in-home health care worker may notice a sudden change in utility bill payment or non-payment. Another area that is open to financial abuse involves theft or misuse of funds by a designated power of attorney.

EARS nurses want to ensure that seniors have choices in Renfrew County, and that they are aware of the options available in abusive situations or to prevent abuse. Nurses

working in the program support, counsel and guide seniors at risk for abuse, their caregivers and their family members, so that seniors are empowered to make their own decisions and choices.

One of those options is the new Senior Crisis Bed Program, which provides short-term safe living arrangements for elderly who are experiencing abuse. It can also be accessed if a caregiver suddenly becomes too stressed or ill to continue caregiving, or by seniors who are currently living in unsafe accommodations with no immediate

resources. Other options explored with the senior at risk are in-home safety planning, assisting with financial management protection and connecting seniors with appropriate community supports and resources.

Anyone can call and talk to a nurse with the EARS program at 1-800-363-7222. Seniors' confidentiality is assured at all times, and nurses are available around the clock. If an elderly person is in immediate danger, call 9-1-1 and stay with the vulnerable senior to support them and provide reassurance until help arrives.



RN Kelly Taylor and Communications Coordinator Jancy Brown with the Women's Sexual Assault Centre in Pembroke, pictured, along with RVH's Jennifer Valiquette, participated in the Toronto education event on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.