

Caring for an Elderly Family Member of Friend? Watch for these signs of Fraud!

Con-artists abound in the elderly community. They know certain things about the elderly and their attitudes which makes them easy prey.

Common acts of fraud involve:

- Larceny
- Embezzlement
- Forgery
- Issuing false documents or checks
- Destruction of wills
- Breach of fiduciary duty
- Violating applicable consumer protection statutes.

Typically elderly people are somewhat financially stable. They tend to own their homes, receive pensions, and may have excellent credit and savings in the bank. They are also quite trusting, a trait that can be attributed to their generation and how they were raised. Con artists know this and they exploit this for their own gain. All elderly are at risk, but ones suffering from a debilitating illness like Alzheimer's Disease may be especially vulnerable.

You need to know who you're dealing with

Con-artists come in all shapes, sizes and professions. They can be fiduciaries - such as lawyers, accountants, financial advisors. Fortunately, most are trustworthy, but there's always the one scoundrel in the bunch. Con artists can be caregivers *and* sadly, they can be family members, which is quite unsettling, because they often have access to important documents and financial statements. Unfortunately, a good deal of financial (and physical) abuse is due to the deceit of an unsavory family member. The health guru with the magic "cure," the phony unlicensed roving home repair guys, a slick unscrupulous telemarketer, an unproven "financial advisor," a shady nursing home - they all work diligently toward one goal - to remove money from the hands of the elderly.

Beware of claims of "Miracle Cures"

The ravages of old age and illness are enough to make the average person seek relief in any form. They may feel that nothing has worked, so why not try something else. The time and money spent chasing the "miracle cure" could be better spent with legitimate medical professionals who truly have the wherewithal to positively affect the quality of life. Avoid, like the plague, anyone promising "a new cure" no matter how desperate you have become to

find a cure. Many a con-artist has represented himself as a medical professional, whipping up useless concoctions in their "lab" and offering these for sale at very high prices. Or someone may claim that the herbs and vitamins they sell are all you'll ever need. And of course, when the products don't work, and some may even *harm you*, they may tell you to "give it some more time and buy some more" or they disappear. And all you have are canceled checks and lost opportunities to have proper medical care.

It's not rude to ask questions and investigate

Be leery of anyone insisting that you must pay up front and pay often. Recoil at the invitation of strangers to pay out large sums of money for something they may have to sell. Check with the Better Business Bureau, your state's Attorney General, even police, before embarking on what may be a scam to drain you or your loved one of hard earned resources. And forget the "get rich quick" schemes. You have got to understand that "they" can't cheat you if you know that huge profits don't come easily or that the likelihood of your being chosen a "winner" in some questionable contest are slim.

When a stranger calls...

Though not every company engaging in telemarketing is fraudulent, there are others that count on keeping you on the phone until they can talk you into giving out personal information i.e. social security number, bank account numbers etc. Hang up! It is not rude or impolite to hang up on someone who intends to do harm. How will you know who's who? Ask them for the business name, a phone number, an address and their name. Then tell them you'll call them back after checking with the Better Business Bureau. At this point, they may try to bully you, or they may be very cooperative and polite, which can be disarming. Follow through. Do not let them intimidate you or rush you. Contact somebody in authority as soon as possible, and **DO NOT** enter any financial agreements before you have done the homework. Better yet, unless you are absolutely certain, do not do any business over the telephone with strangers, period. And beware of the stranger who after repeated phone calls refers to himself as your "friend."

Don't let embarrassment keep you from seeking help

If you or your loved one do get scammed, don't let shame keep you from reporting it to police or other legal authorities. Do your best to keep track of dates, times, names, and the promises made to you by a con artist. Try to document everything that occurred by writing it all down. Quickly get to a person in a position of authority. Your loss may or may not be recovered, but your swift action may stop the con-artist from finding more victims. For the Alzheimer's sufferer, remembering dates, times and names might be an impossibility - all the more reason for responsible, trustworthy caregivers to be watchful and careful. Consult a trusted attorney to

see if there are ways to prevent you or your loved one from becoming embroiled in some dubious financial scheme. Caring family members have to be certain that the person or people entrusted with the care of their loved one are trustworthy; but even under the best of circumstances, it would not hurt to be forever watchful.

Contact state agencies to get information on nursing home reputations

Misappropriation of funds can also result from dealing with shady nursing homes. Some may be involved in Medicare fraud, charging for services that were never performed, or medicines that were never dispensed. Some may even attach liens to property like vehicles or real estate when there was no agreement or reason for such. Most states have some sort of regulatory agency that oversees the operations of nursing homes. It is wise to check for appropriate licenses, references and state agency ratings before placing your loved one in the hands of unregulated facilities.

The following are some of the indicators that financial exploitation may be taking place:

- Bank statements and checks no longer come to the elder's home
- The elder is being isolated from others
- Living conditions are below the elder's ability to pay
- The elder is being deprived of certain items like toiletries, television, etc. even though they have the income to pay
- The caregiver refuses to spend money on the elder
- The caregiver shows open hostility to visitors
- Bills are not being paid on time or at all
- There is unusual activity on credit cards or on bank statements
- Real estate and automobile titles are being transferred to another party
- A caregiver is coercing a mentally confused elder to sign Powers of Attorney
- Valuable personal property is missing
- Important documents are missing
- Unfamiliar persons or questionable family members have moved in