

Aging Happens: Adult Protective Services plays a vital role

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November 8, 2016

(Part 1 of 2)

Many years ago, I had gotten a call from Adult Protective Services (APS) regarding an older man who was in really bad shape. His family member was supposedly taking care of him in his own home. But when APS got involved, it was a different and very sad story. The family member had left in a hurry, with a large amount of his cash. This man could not get out of bed on his own, and no one knew the last time he had been bathed, groomed, toileted, or fed.

At the hospital, it took two aides an entire day to remove packed-on grim, cut his hair and nails and feed him. When I saw him again, I actually did not recognize him as the same person I had seen days before. This is an extreme example of the important services APS provides to our communities. I have always referred to them as “the good guys.” They advocate for our most vulnerable older folks, and make sure they get the help they need. This topic of protection from scams, neglect and abuse is so vital that it will actually require two separate columns to cover.

A group of specialists at APS devoted quite some time to answering questions I had posed to them, and it was important that none of this be left out. This is the first series of questions and answers.

1. What is the role of APS in our community, with regards to older adults?

The role of APS in Oregon communities centers on four key areas:

- **Response:** Local APS Specialists have a very important role to ensure a timely and effective response to abuse or neglect that is reported. Responding quickly and thoroughly is not only critical, but helps ensure the safety and long-term health of the older adults living in Oregon communities. In addition, APS depends on community members to report abuse, as they can only respond to abuse they are aware of. That means APS needs the local public to assist them in protecting older adults. APS Specialists also provide consultative information, protective services and intervene in a way that does not do any further harm.
- **Education/Awareness:** APS provides abuse education and awareness materials to help educate Oregon communities on the signs of abuse, and how and where to report it. Reporting enables investigators to intervene with protective services for incidents that would have otherwise gone unnoticed.

One source of education for Oregon communities is the Annual Abuse Report created by the Office of Adult Abuse Prevention and Investigations (OAAPI). This report contains abuse trends, a list of mandatory reporters, and specific information about abuse and neglect for individuals living at home or in a facility-type setting. To read more about these reports, go to www.oregon.gov/DHS/SENIORS-DISABILITIES/ADULT-ABUSE/Pages/index.aspx.

- **Prevention:** The third role of APS is to take steps to prevent abuse before it occurs. One way to do this is to collaborate with community members to raise awareness as a primary source of prevention. For

example, a Financial Exploitation study by OAAPI resulted in the ability to educate Oregonians with a better understanding of the scope and impact of financial exploitation in local communities.

Financial exploitation has an impact on the well-being of older adults, financial institutions and taxpayers in Oregon communities. This type of abuse can result in the loss of years of hard work, lack of money to pay basic living expenses such as food and electricity, and hope for future security gone. This study pointed out that communication and collaboration can make a difference.

APS workers also participate in secondary types of prevention, such as coordination with local multi-disciplinary teams on adult abuse, coordinating efforts with local law enforcement or the Long-Term Care Ombudsman office for older adults who live in facilities, and collaborating with other community groups who help keep Oregonians independent, healthy and safe.

- Community engagement: We know that a strong investment in community partnerships is vital. Last year, the Department of Human Services (DHS) received more than 43,000 reports of possible abuse and neglect of vulnerable Oregonians. It is important that Oregonians understand that adult abuse is a family issue, a public health issue, a community issue and an Oregon issue. Abuse can happen to anyone. So, an engaged community can become a safe community for all who live there.

In the next column (on Nov. 30) there will be more info from APS. For now, if you need to report any concerns about neglect or abuse, call 541-618-7853 or 855-503-SAFE (7233), for out of the area cases.