

Dementia and Elder Abuse: Challenges Faced by Hospital Social Workers

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Introduction:

Hospital admissions provide a window of opportunity to identify and respond to elder abuse concerns experienced by older people.

Case Study 1

74F from home with grandson who was brought in ambulance post fall. Financial and psychological abuse reported by patient and indications from outreach services. Unable to gather adequate evidence by team due to patient's dementia diagnosis. SAT application completed however alleged perpetrator was appointed as the guardian.

Case Study 2

84F from home with daughter admitted due pneumonia. Patient reported ongoing financial and emotional abuse by her daughter. Patient does not wish to reported the concerns to WAPOL however does not wish to return home. Patient decided to access residential care to avoid abuse but refused to report any concerns.

Challenges

High Caseload and time constraints
Communication difficulties of patient
Cognitive impairment
Lack of mandatory report and community outreach services.
Ethical Dilemma - patient self-determination vs duty of care

Recommendations

comprehensive assessment tools for people with cognitive impairment
clearer referral pathways for follow-up in the community
mandatory reporting,
a safeguarding unit to support older people experiencing elder abuse
Funding for more geriatric outreach services.