

INQUIRY INTO INQUIRY INTO ELDER ABUSE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Australian Medical Association

Date received: 20/11/2015

20 November 2015

The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

Via email: gpscno2@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Ms Dunn,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the important issue of elder abuse in NSW.

The AMA is a medico-political organisation that represents over eight thousand doctors in training, career medical officers, staff specialists, visiting medical officers and specialists and general practitioners in private practice. As such, the AMA (NSW) submission to the inquiry into elder abuse relates primarily to the role of the medical practitioner as a conduit to the providing appropriate support and care of the older patient.

The AMA (NSW) recognises that ageing population is increasing and that policy makers must consider how an increase in this population will impact policy development, service capacity and funding issues in relation to elder abuse.

Because elder abuse is most commonly perpetuated by family members,¹ there can be a significant reluctance on the part of the victim to report the abuse and potentially sever the family relationship.² Consequently, identifying the precursors and signs of elder abuse is an important aspect of prevention and intervention.³

Medical practitioners, in particular, general practitioners (GPs), are often the first independent professional to see an older victim of abuse.⁴ As a consequence, medical

¹ Jennifer Blakey (2015) Witness statement to the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence, 10 July 2015; Seniors Rights Victoria (2015) Submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

² Bagshaw, D., Wendt, S. & Zannettino, L. (2009) Preventing the abuse of older people by their family members. Stakeholder Paper No.7, Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse; Office of the Public Advocate (Qld) and Queensland Law Society (2010) Elder Abuse: How well does the law in Queensland cope?

³ State of Victoria Department of Health (2012) Elder abuse prevention and response guidelines for action 2012-14.

⁴ RACGP (2014) Abuse and violence: working with our patients in general practice, 4th Ed. (the White Book).

practitioners have a pivotal role in the recognition, assessment, understanding and management of elder abuse and neglect.⁵

Improving access to medical services for older people who live in the community and residential aged care represent windows of opportunity for detecting and responding to cases of elder abuse,⁶ however there is a shortage of funding to meet the training needs of those in the frontline across the sector, and a failure of the MBS to appropriately value the delivery of care to older patients.⁷

Although GPs and other health professionals often treat abused patients, in cases where a patient does not disclose, it can be extremely difficult for any practitioner to identify that abuse is occurring. Even if abuse is suspected or identified, there can be a resistance to discuss, document, refer, and follow up with victims due to an array of reasons. This means the opportunity to act will often be missed.⁸

A further barrier to adequate responses is the lack of recognition in the MBS of the significant non face-to-face time a medical practitioner would need to spend to coordinate an appropriate continuum of referrals and services for patients experiencing abuse. A Medicare item number for GPs to liaise with social services would recognise the holistic services provided, not just the time spent providing clinical treatment.

In summary, the AMA(NSW) makes the following recommendations:

1. Funding accessible training to frontline medical practitioners in identifying and managing elder abuse.
2. A Medicare item number to liaise with social services.

The AMA(NSW) welcomes any opportunity to work the NSW government to advance these issues.

Yours sincerely,

Sim Mead

Director, Policy & Industrial Relations, AMA (NSW)

⁵ Australian Medical Association (2011) AMA Position Statement on Care of Older People 1998-amended 2000 and 2011.

⁶ Seniors Rights Victoria (2015) Submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

⁷ Australian Medical Association (2012) AMA Position Statement: Access to Medical Care for Older Australians.

⁸ Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (2015) RACGP Submission to Royal Commission into Family Violence 29 May 2015.