

# Identifying abuse is the first step

Photo: Irwin Block



**Dr. Mark Yaffe and bank manager Roula Marinos answering questions on elder abuse.**

## Irwin Block

**Elder abuse, whether it's physical, emotional, psychological, or financial, is a reality in our society. It affects 10 per cent of older adults, and, say the experts, identifying it is the first step in preventing it.**

That is not a simple task because victims often are afraid of alienating a caregiver who may be a family member or worse, reprisals. Often abused or exploited seniors do not recognize themselves as victims.

To assist in that process, Dr. Mark Yaffe, professor of family medicine at McGill and affiliated to St. Mary's Hospital, led a group that developed the Elder Abuse Suspicion Index (E.A.S.I.) – a short questionnaire used by healthcare professionals when they suspect elder abuse.

The questionnaire has been well received by professionals and seniors, in Montreal and elsewhere in North America, Yaffe told his audience May 24 at the Gelber Centre.

The Cummings Centre Social Action Committee organized the talk.

The survey asks whether in the past six months, there has been neglect: has anyone prevented you from getting food, clothes, medication, glasses, a hearing aid, medical care, or tried to stop you from being with someone you wanted to be with?

On verbal or emotional abuse: have you been upset because someone talks to you in a way that makes you feel ashamed or threatened?

On financial or material abuse: has anyone forced you to sign papers or to give them money against your will?

On physical abuse: has anyone made you feel afraid, touched you in a way you did not want, or hurt you physically?

The broader question asks whether in the past year you have avoided eye contact with those around you, felt withdrawn, experienced malnourishment, hygiene issues, cuts, bruises, inappropriate clothing or medication, and compliance issues.

"If the answer is yes to any of these questions, one needs to ask more specific questions," Yaffe told the audience of some 100.

Sexual abuse covers both physical and psychological abuse, and includes undesired sexual contact, touching, rubbing, or masturbation that is forced, tricked, coerced, manipulated, or happened when the senior lacked the capacity to consent.

Once identified, what can be done? Is legislation the answer?

In three of ten provinces, there is some form of mandatory reporting, and Quebec is examining a bill that deals with mandatory reporting of abuse by institutions. In the U.S. 47 states have mandatory reporting, but Yaffe questions its usefulness.

"In the U.S., it has not had any impact on decreasing the prevalence of abuse," he said.

Some victims will not seek punitive action because they are embarrassed that the perpetrator is a family member, Yaffe noted. And as a consequence, the senior might end up in an institution where abuse continues.

Statistically speaking, if there are 1.32 million Quebecers age 65 and over, and if the 10 per cent abuse figure is applied, that could mean mandatory reporting of 132,000 abuse cases. Because our socio-legal system is not equipped for this volume, Yaffe suggested the criteria for mandatory reporting would have to be carefully defined.

Elder abuse could be rooted in social problems such as marital abuse or dysfunctional families that extend into old age. The emphasis should be on dealing with individual dysfunctionality before seniors reach the age when they can no longer fend for themselves.

"Elder abuse is closely linked to family caregiving ... no level of government has done an adequate job in ensuring that families are adequately supported financially and socially to be able to look after senior relatives at home."

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# New Conservative leader is out of touch with our values

Late last month, we watched with a mixture of horror and fascination as Adrienne Arseneault, senior correspondent for CBC News, and a production crew followed a courageous group of photographers in the Philippines capital of Manila as they went through the grisly and perilous task of documenting the latest in the series of government condoned killings of suspected drug addicts and dealers.

This revealing news documentary, presented on CBC TV as a special report, brought home in a graphic and dramatic way the continuing story of the aftermath of Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte's election a year ago on a pledge to "kill every drug dealer and user, and feed their corpses to the fish in Manila Bay."

Arseneault's report was just one more example of the important role CBC News plays, in English and French networks, on radio, TV and online, in providing accurate and balanced reports and background on what matters at home and, to the extent of its limited budget, around the world.

Though they have their strengths, the private networks do not and cannot compete at the same level.

The excellence of CBC News and the importance of its role does not seem to matter to Andrew Scheer, the newly elected leader of the Conservative Party. He wants to scrap CBC News in its entirety. He made that point during a campaign that showed how out of touch Conservative leadership hopefuls were to public opinion, especially in Quebec.

Scheer narrowly defeated libertarian Maxime Bernier, the Beauce MP who wants to get rid of supply management that is so essential to maintaining the family farm, especially in Quebec where guaranteed base prices for milk are essential to the dairy industry here.

He's the same Bernier who left behind an important confidential file at his then girlfriend's house in Laval! Simcoe-Grey Conservative MP Kellie Leitch, meanwhile, got lots of press from her demand to screen immigrants for "anti-Canadian values." For a while, she was a front-runner, and so was Bernier.

Scheer, the former House of Commons Speaker, won with the support of social conservatives, many of whose values he shares, which is why we are so concerned about the man pundits call Stephen Harper 2.0 or Harper light.

High on their agenda is opposition to same-sex marriage and abortion rights. Scheer is on record as personally sharing these views, though he's promised, if elected, not to reopen these issues. What concerns us,

however, are his core values. Scheer is a practicing Roman Catholic and firm believer in its precepts, which is entirely his right. However, his core values may well affect his judgment on developing programs should his party be asked to form a government. His stated belief that CBC should get out of the news business is particularly disturbing.

Scheer claims that "taxpayers are very frustrated by how much the CBC costs" but fails to back this up. The Liberal government has a radically different priority, and in 2016 agreed to reverse Harper's budget cuts and inject \$575 million into a re-invigorated CBC over five years. The Liberals seem to get it.

They understand the importance of the role of the public broadcaster and the arms-length relationship with government that we replicated from the example of the excellent British Broadcasting Corporation. Scheer does not seem to get it, or maybe he and fellow Tories mistakenly believe that CBC reflects an ingrained left-wing bias. While many of its journalists may tend to have liberal leanings, they are trained to provide fair and balanced coverage, and are monitored.

Scheer said in a pre-Christmas speech: "I don't know why this government is in the news business in this day and age with so many platforms and so many ways to disseminate information." He went on to allege that the government has a "glaring" conflict of interest in operating the CBC. Again, he doesn't seem to get it.

There is a necessary and essential "arms length" relationship that the public broadcaster – not the state broadcaster – is committed to maintaining with regard to coverage of government activities. Lest we forget how upset the Liberals under Jean Chrétien were with then Vancouver correspondent Terry Milewski, now retired, and his aggressive reporting of protests in the 1997 Asian Pacific Economic Conference summit in Vancouver, when Milewski was suspended for three days from the CBC. After a review by then CBC ombudsman Marcel Pepin, he was cleared of charges of bias and credited with "aggressive and critical journalism that was of value to the public interest." Milewski was then transferred to Ottawa where he continued his role there covering major events in the capital.

At a time when the major print media and conventional television are cutting staff and reducing coverage because of declining ad revenue, the presence of the CBC News at major events and its role in recording

history, and as a watchdog, are more necessary than ever. We only have to look at the decline of the Montreal Gazette, which has lost most of its editorial staff to buyouts and even layoffs, and the resultant reduced coverage of local events to appreciate what CBC radio and television provide in terms of coverage. Without the competition the CBC offers, there is every likelihood private television and radio would reduce their spending on news coverage. On the issue of sustained and continuing support for CBC/Radio Canada, Scheer is out to lunch.

And as for his values on social

issues, whether he plans to act on them or not, we do not approve. When he says "I've never met a tax cut I haven't liked," we see our Medicare systems struggling, in large part because federal transfer payments are not keeping pace with the growing needs of an aging population. We see university budgets stretched and fees hiked, making it more and more unaffordable for working families. We see housing in aboriginal communities deteriorating and standards of care for ailing seniors declining. And Scheer cheers when those who can afford to help the less fortunate get tax cuts.

## Mediation helps decrease abuse

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"Legal recourse, we don't believe is going to be a solution for a good proportion of elder abuse," Yaffe said.

As an alternative, he pointed to the free elder abuse clinic run by lawyer Ann Soden out of the Atwater Library. It has adopted a mediation approach to the problem.

"She works exceptionally hard to bring the perpetrator and the victim together to see whether there is a compromise that can be reached to decrease the acts of abuse or their severity," he said.

"No mediation is perfect, but if it decreases the episodes of abuse, then it's successful." He quoted from American Jewish theologian, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, who said: "A test of a people is how it behaves toward the old. It is easy to love children ... But the affection and care for the old, the incurable, the helpless are the true gold mines of a culture."

Roula Marinos, Royal Bank branch manager on Queen Mary, reported that Ontario Provincial Police have declared that financial abuse of seniors has reached epidemic proportions.

"Financial abuse starts off slowly, with a little transaction here, and then

it kind of snowballs," she said. The person perpetrating misuse could be a trusted family member, friend, neighbour, or caregiver. The most vulnerable are those who are alone, and have no close relatives nearby, she said. Marinos recommended seniors think twice and even consult a lawyer before turning over ATM or credit cards to someone else, placing limits on power of attorney, and monitoring use of any joint accounts. "Do not share your personal identification with anyone," Marinos warned.

Marrick Bertrand, a Quebec government help-line supervisor, and social worker Lidia Volvich, suggested calling Elder Abuse Hotline (1-888-489-2287) to discuss any mistreatment issues. It operates seven days a week from 8 am to 8 pm, is bilingual, and has access to interpreters in other languages.

If there is an emergency, seniors are asked to call 911, or for questions of concern, and for non-urgent health issues, Info-Santé at 811.

Sometimes, a call from an intervention staffer associated with the hotline can have a dissuasive effect on the perpetrator, they said.

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