Abuse & Neglect (Suspected)

Purpose: To provide the process for assessment and management for patients of suspected child abuse and elder abuse.

When emergency personnel suspect that a patient has been abused (physically and/or sexually), neglected, or exploited, a report must be made to the emergency physician on arrival at the hospital and to the Protective Services Agency (child or adult). The primary purpose is protection of the patient from further harm. Do not confront the patient or family members with such suspicions at the scene.

Michigan law (MCL 722.623) requires that licensed EMS providers who have "reasonable cause to suspect child abuse or neglect" shall report "immediately, by telephone or otherwise" their suspicions to the Protective Services Agency for the County involved. In cases of suspected child abuse, this oral report shall also be followed with a written report on the Department of Human Services forms available in every hospital emergency department.

Michigan law (MCL 400.11a) also requires this same oral report for suspected cases of abuse or neglect of an adult.

1. Definitions

"Child Abuse" means harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare by a parent, legal guardian, or any other person responsible for the child's health or welfare…that occurs through non-accidental physical or mental injury; sexual abuse; sexual exploitation, or maltreatment.

"Child Neglect" means harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare by a parent, legal guardian, or any other person responsible for the child health or welfare that occurs through either of the following: 1) Negligent treatment, including the failure to provide adequate food, shelter, or medical care; 2) Placing a child at an unreasonable risk to the child's health or welfare by failure of the parent, legal guardian, or any other person responsible for the child's health or welfare to intervene to eliminate that risk when that person is able to do so and has, or should have, knowledge of the risk.

"Abuse" means harm or threatened harm to an adult's health or welfare caused by another person. Abuse includes, but is not limited to, non-accidental physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, or maltreatment.

"Exploitation" means an action that involves the misuse of an adult's funds, property, or personal dignity by another person.

"Neglect" means harm to an adult's health or welfare caused by the inability of the adult to respond to a harmful situation or by the conduct of a person who assumes responsibility for a significant aspect of the adult's health or welfare. Neglect includes the failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, or medical care.

2. Indicators of Possible Abuse

- Unsolicited history provided by the patient
- Delay in seeking care for injury
- Injury inconsistent with history provided
- Conflicting reports of injury from patient and care-giver
- Patient unable, or unwilling, to describe mechanism of injury
- Lacerations, bruises, ecchymosis in various stages of healing
- Multiple fractures in various stages of healing
- Scald burns with demarcated immersion lines without splash marks
- Scald burns involving anterior or posterior half of extremity
- Scald burns involving buttocks or genitalia
- Cigarette burns
- Rope burns or marks
- Patient confined to restricted space or position
- Pregnancy or presence of venereal disease in a child less than 12 years

3. Physical Assessment

A. Treat and document physical injury per the appropriate medical treatment protocol.
B. Observe for:
   - Potential over-sedation
   - Inappropriate fear
   - Avoidance behavior
   - Poor parent-child bonding
   - Inappropriate interaction with care giver

4. Evaluation and Documentation

- Focus the interview on the patient's physical injury. Do not address the specifics of abuse or neglect at this point.
- Obtain and record pertinent history related to the presenting problems.
- Determine and chart past medical history, and any cognitive or physical impairment.
- Note signs of inadequate housing or lack of facilities such as heat or water.
- Carefully and specifically document the patient's statement of instances of rough handling, sexual abuse, alcohol or drug abuse by family members,

verbal or emotional abuse, isolation or confinement, misuse of property or theft, threats, gross neglect such as restriction of fluids, food or hygiene.

- Attempt to record, verbatim (word for word), any excited utterances (spontaneous comments).
- If necessary, ask the care-giver for information regarding the patient's medical condition. Observe mental health of care-giver.
- Request police assistance if there is any history of threatening, abusive, or violent acts. Protect yourself while obtaining a safe environment for the patient.

5. **Special Considerations**

- If the patient is not transported, the suspected abuse must still be reported. Law enforcement may also be contacted, at the discretion of EMS providers.
- Careful and specific documentation is vital because the "story" often changes as the investigation proceeds.
- Contact the Department of Human Services Hotline at 1-855-444-3911.