



Don't bury your head in the sand!

DO YOU KNOW of an older person cared for by your organisation that has been, is being or is about to be financially abused by their own children? It seems like a far out question, one intended to stir the pot and possibly even over-dramatise a situation that may not actually occur all that often.

But when the personal financial solutions manager of State Trustees Victoria, Steven Cowell, asked 190 aged care staff at the Aged & Community Care Victoria (ACCV) Residential Care Seminar whether or not they had encountered elder abuse on the job, 75 per cent of the audience raised their hand.

"It's a hidden crime," Mr Cowell said. "The fact that so many people put up their hands says to me that what we see are the cases where people get caught. What we don't see is those who are smart and shrewd and get away with it. God knows how many of those [type of] people are out there.

"The main perpetrators are children... It's not the person you meet at the tram stop, a dodgy priest or a neighbour. It's the people the older person trusts intrinsically and it's their sons and daughters. It's opportunistic. They



know the full nature and extent to their parent's assets, their pin numbers and have access to documents and bank accounts."

Aged care staff, Mr Cowell said, are best placed to identify and monitor a possible situation involving financial elder abuse. "But facilities usually take the view that money matters are family matters. So they say, 'We will leave it in the family as family knows best'. It's about awareness and education. You are best placed to provide that to the people you care for. You are best placed to help if the person needs help.

"Don't feel that, because the matter is about money, you can't

ask the resident [what is going on]. You are okay with asking about hygiene and other personal issues but when it comes to money, everyone in the health care sector freezes up. Don't be afraid to get onto the issue."

The solution, Mr Cowell said, is for aged care staff to get involved and act early. "You are best placed to discuss the resident's options and provide information about enduring powers of attorney and entrusting guardianship to a professional entity.

"The older person doesn't have to choose that [option] but as long as the person is aware that there are other options and

things that they can do. Financial abuse is ever present. Yours is the profession that needs to identify it early, provide advice and initiate legal remedies before it is too late." ❧

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