

# 3rd Annual Clerks' Statewide Investigations Alliance Training Symposium

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# Intrafamilial Conflict

- Expected: between adult siblings; between adult child and parent
- In conflict over an aging parent, family can overcome with:
  - Solidarity
  - Effective communication
  - Relatively aligned ideas
  - Joint decision making/conflict resolution skills
  - Openness to education and guidance
- Negative impact on other family members is minimal and can even be positive experience for children



# What if . . .

- Fractured sibling relationships
- Parent-child/adult child favoritism
- Focus on past injustices
- Highly conflicted parent-adult child relationship
- Adult child w/ mental illness, substance abuse, financial problems
- Divorce-related restructuring
- Trauma within the family –
  - aging parent as perpetrator
  - caregiver as perpetrator
- Vastly different childhood and family history narratives





# Multigenerational family conflict

- Significant predictor of family conflict in end-of-life situations included prior unresolved family conflict (Kramer, et.al., 2006; Kramer, et.al., 2010; Kramer, et.al., 2015)
- There are generational patterns of conflict and children often learn their behaviors from the generations before (Borst, 2015)
- Single generation conflict a risk factor for maladaptive outcomes
- Conflict shows continuity across generations
- The cumulative effect of prior and current generation conflict:
  - developmentally accrued interpersonal skill deficits exacerbate current conflict
  - lack of social support of prior family
  - resulting overload of coping resources in current family

(Rothenberg, Housong, Chassin, 2016; Rothenberg, Solis, Hussong, Chassin, 2017; Rothenberg, Hussong, & Chassin, 2018)

# What does this mean for the elder?

- These families often cannot navigate the myriad issues surrounding the aging family member
- They litigate the family dynamics, NOT the legal issues
- High family conflict has deleterious impact on multiple family members – biggest loser is the elder
- Family members become increasingly embittered causing litigation to continue – maybe until the elder dies
- The unfortunate legacy: There may be a cumulative effect of conflict that negatively impacts psychological and physical functioning that results from the conflict experienced across multiple generations



# Unpredictable Alliances



- Perceived parental favoritism in childhood predicts current tension among siblings (Suitor, et.al., 2009 and 2014; Gilligan, 2013)
- Adult children often inaccurately identify a parent's preferred caregiver (Elder may not correct the misperception) (Suitor, et.al., 2019)
- Caregivers sometimes are not the most socially proficient or psychologically healthy child but may be most convenient (Bornstein, 2018)
- Caregiver may be financially dependent and fearful of losing financial support/financial control (Bornstein, 2018)
- Poor quality relationship with parent does not preclude caregiving but:
  - Parental rejection/hostility back to childhood may negatively impact quality of helping behavior and conflicted interactions may remain (Whitbeck, 1994; Pickering, et.al., 2011, 2015, 2015)
  - Caregiving for abusive parent may lead to depression, lower life satisfaction, emotional distress, aggression toward elder (Kong, 2017; Kong & Moorman, 2015; Liu, et.al., 2018)



# Stress on Caregiver (of aging, disabled, or terminally ill)

- Demands of caregiving/seeing a relative become disabled can lead to:
  - Poorer mental health and physical health (Depression, Anxiety, health complaints)
  - Increased conflict with family members

(Schulz, Visintainer, & Williamson, 1990; Strawbridge, et.al., 1997)

- ‘Current’ family conflict in turn worsens caregiver well-being:
  - Higher perceived burden and poorer mental health
  - Reduced ability to cope/reduced resilience
  - Mediates the relationship between elder impairment and caregiver stress

(Strawbridge and Wallegen, 1991; Deimlin, Smerglassia, & Schaefer, 2001; Kwak, et.al, 2010; Scharlach, Li, & Dalvi, 2006; Semple, 1992)

- Conflict also affects the caregiver’s ability to make decisions:
  - Difficulty with placement search process (Gaugler, Pearlin, Leitsch, & Davey, 2001)
  - Managing the conflict becomes the focus rather than the elder’s care (Elliott, et. al., 2007)



# Impact of Conflict on Elder

- Conflict leads to end-of-life decisions less aligned with elder's wishes (Elliott, et.al., 2007; Parks, et.al., 2011)
- Conflict jeopardizes quality of care and medical compliance (Davis, 1997; Kayashima & Braun, 2001; (Kramer & Yonkers, 2011; DiMatteo, 2004)
- Conflict in family network impacts psychological health (Widmer, et. al., 2018)
- Hostility associated with increased cognitive impairment over 10 years (Toussaint, 2018)
- Perpetrators of elder abuse isolate elder from family/friends (Bornstein, 2019)
- Family conflict can separate elder from family/friends
- Guardianship can then lead to further isolation (Pogach, 2018)



# Impact of Conflict on Elder (cont.)

- What is the impact of Social Isolation and Loneliness\* on Elder?
  - Elevated to major international health concerns, a “loneliness epidemic”
  - Social integration decreases rate of cognitive decline
  - Social isolation increases dementia risk decline in ADL proficiency
  - Association with various adverse health outcomes, including mortality
  - Quality of relationship is important
    - hired personnel not necessarily a replacement unless naturally occurring are absent or detrimental
- \*Social isolation=objective social contact; Loneliness=dissatisfaction with frequency and closeness of relationships
- (Hold-Lundstad, 2017, Hold-Lundstad, et al., 2017, Rafnsson, et.al, 2017; Shankar, et. al., 2013)



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