



CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Self-neglect among elderly a hidden problem

By Jane Sutter

A silent epidemic is sweeping through our elderly population, and the cure is elusive.

Many seniors are not taking proper care of themselves, but family, friends and concerned observers can struggle with convincing them to make changes.

The problem is called elderly self-neglect and it gets little publicity compared to other types of elderly abuse, such as physical, sexual, emotional and financial. As Alan Lewitz, director of the Bureau of Adult Services for New York State, put it in a recent Adult Services newsletter: "If you don't work in Adult Protective Services, you probably do not know that the majority of APS referrals are 'self-neglect cases.' These are cases in which the danger to an adult with impairments is due to an inability to care for or protect oneself from harm, rather than due to the action or inaction of another person."

Anna Sansevero, founder and CEO of HealthSense LLC, an

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E-cigarettes can pack a harmful punch

By Jane Sutter

With flavors called Gummy Bear, peanut butter cup, blueberry cheesecake, chocolate mint and cherry cola, it's no wonder that adolescents are attracted to electronic cigarettes.

Yet these e-cigarettes can pack a harmful punch, often containing high levels of addictive nicotine, not to mention additives like heavy metals and volatile organic products.

Despite what many teens believe, e-cigarettes are not a safe alternative to cigarettes, research indicates.

"Nicotine is known to be especially harmful to the developing brain," says Becky Wexler, director of media relations for the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, a national advocacy group. "The brains of kids in middle school and high school aren't fully developed. Exposure to nicotine at that age can lead to attention problems and learning problems."

A study by the U.S. Surgeon General showed that adolescents who use nicotine may experience lower impulse control and mood disorders, and nicotine can prime their brains for addiction to alcohol and other drugs, such as cocaine.

Because e-cigarettes are a relatively new phenomenon, parents and teachers (who never smoked cigarettes or have



kicked the habit) may not be familiar with these alternatives, which go by a variety of names such as e-cigs, e-smokes, vapes, personal vaporizers (PVs) and advance personal vaporizers (APVs), mods, pod mods, pod vape devices, wop machines and vape pens.

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aging life care management consulting practice, has seen first-hand a number of cases of elderly self-neglect. "It's kind of a silent epidemic because we have a growing population of elders that are living longer and may have some sort of cognitive impairment."

Sansevero, who is also a board member of the Aging Life Care Association, said that many seniors are "really terrified about not being autonomous any more" and they begin to make decisions that impede their safety. "They start taking risks with their ability to drive or they start taking risks with being in their home without some support."

A 2014 survey of almost 300 geriatric care managers found:

- 92 percent of care managers said that elderly self-neglect was a significant problem in their community, with 52 percent saying it is a significant and growing problem.
- 94 percent of care managers agreed that elderly self-neglect is a largely hidden problem with cases frequently or mostly going unreported.
- 76 percent of the care managers surveyed reported that elderly self-neglect is the most common non-financial form of elder abuse/neglect that they encounter in their practices. Another form of neglect – that by family or others – was the second most commonly reported form (16 percent), followed by emotional/psychological abuse (8 percent) and physical and sexual abuse (1 percent).

The Aging Life Care Association (which at the time was named the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers) conducted the survey.

Sansevero said there are a number of signs that an elder is not taking good care of himself or herself. These include: spoiled food in the refrigerator (where the senior is unable to determine what's good and what isn't); a house so cluttered the elder can't find things; the senior starts to be late paying bills (after being on time for years); an elder not bathing because he's afraid of falling in the shower or tub, and wearing clothes that smell because they haven't been laundered.

"They may have had falls but they're covering it up. They may have bruises on

themselves but they deny that they've had the fall," Sansevero said.

Compounding the issue is that the elder may have dementia or another mental illness such as depression or is bi-polar, Sansevero said.

Here are two examples from the Aging Life Care survey as reported by care managers:

"A husband and wife both had dementia. The husband had always been in charge, and at one time had been quite capable. When I met them, his dementia was significant enough that he could no longer effectively and safely run the household and neither one of them realized this. Huge hoarding issue with papers, magazines, books, computers... beautiful house was FULL of stuff, so much that it was challenging to walk through. Husband had frequent falls. Neither was cooking. They were surviving on granola bars and Pepsi."

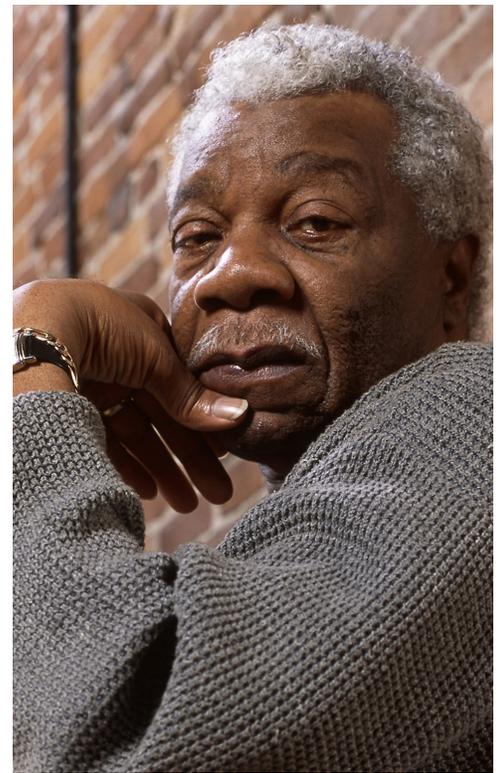
"...Senior was living alone and unwilling to accept help because she said, 'Nothing is wrong.' She had weight loss of 40 pounds, mail piled up, and bills unpaid despite saying she was 'going thru my papers.' There was wet underwear from urine hung up to dry (not washed out). She was forgetting to take her pills. BUT, THE CAT IS ALWAYS FED!"

Often it isn't until a crisis happens, such as the senior falls and is admitted to the hospital, and then family or friends realize there are problems, Sansevero said.

With today's mobile society, the children of the elderly often live many miles away and can't keep close tabs on a parent. That's where it behooves fellow parishioners, friends and neighbors to be mindful of the elderly.

"We are a village, we are a community, we should not forget about our frail elders living in the community," Sansevero said. "We can say, oh, she's doing great, she's 90, well she may not be doing so great, she may be doing ok, but there's a way to support them. I think, we as a

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What are the warning signs of elderly self-neglect?

The six warning signs of self-neglect most often cited by care managers are:

1. Signs of poor personal hygiene/not bathing or taking care of hair and nails.
2. Poor medication management or refusing to take medications.
3. Signs of dehydration, malnutrition or other unattended health conditions.
4. Unsanitary or very unclean living quarters
5. Signs of unpaid bills, bounced checks or utility shutoffs
6. Lack of adequate food in house or signs of weight loss

Source: Aging Life Care Association

To report a possible case of elderly self-neglect, call New York State Adult Protective Services: 1-844-697-3505 or call your county's Adult Protective Services department directly.

For a list of numbers, go here:

<https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/psa/local-APS-intake.asp>

Here's how an e-cigarette or a similar device works: It contains a battery that heats a flavored liquid (often called e-liquid or e-juice) into an aerosol that users inhale. These liquids contain additives (such as heavy metals and volatile organic compounds) and often have nicotine, which has been proven to be highly addictive.

Quickly gaining in popularity with adolescents is an e-cigarette device called Juul. It looks like a USB flash drive, so it's easy to hide in the palm of a hand or attach to a computer (that will then recharge it). Being able to fool teachers and parents is part of Juul's appeal, Wexler said. Juul users purchase pods of nicotine liquid in popular flavors such as mango and cool mint, which connect to the Juul. Each pod contains as much nicotine as a pack of cigarettes (about 200 puffs), according to Wexler.

The Juul device is so popular with adolescents that they've turned the word "Juul" into a verb, "Juuling," the action of using a Juul.

The various e-cig devices have increased in popularity at an alarming rate between 2014 and 2016, according to the New York State Youth Tobacco Survey. The percent of middle school students who had ever tried e-cigarettes increased from 6.9 percent to 14.1 percent. Among high school students, the rate increased from 21.6 percent to 43.8 percent.

The percent of New York students who reported using an e-cigarette within the past 30 days also doubled, from 3.2 percent to 6.4 percent for middle schools and from 10.5 percent to 20.6 percent for high school. The same research also shows that electronic cigarettes are now the most popular tobacco product for youth under the age of 18. And it's likely that teens who use electronic cigarettes are at greater risk of using tobacco cigarettes down the road, research shows.

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How to talk to youth about using e-cigarettes

The Office on Smoking and Health at the Centers for Disease Control encourages parents to have an ongoing conversation (not a lecture) with their kids about the dangers of e-cigarettes.

Before that happens, parents should:

1. Learn the facts at <https://e-cigarettes.surgeongeneral.gov/>
2. Be patient and ready to listen. Avoid criticizing and strive for an open dialogue. The goal is to have a conversation. It's OK for that to happen in small bits and for the conversations to take place at various times.
3. Set a positive example by being tobacco free.

Here are some examples of questions teens might pose and potential answers that parents can give.

Why don't you want me to use e-cigarettes?

- Science shows that e-cigarettes contain ingredients that are addictive and could harm different parts of your body.
- Right now, your brain is still developing, which means you are more vulnerable to addiction. Many e-cigarettes contain nicotine and using nicotine can change your brain to make you crave more nicotine. It can also affect your memory and concentration.

- E-cigarettes contain chemicals that are harmful. When people use e-cigarettes, they breathe in tiny particles that can harm their lungs.

- The cloud that people exhale from e-cigarettes can expose you to chemicals that are not safe to breathe.

What's the big deal about nicotine?

- Your brain is still developing until about age 25. The Surgeon General reported that nicotine is addictive and can harm your brain development.

- Using nicotine at your age may make it harder for you to concentrate, learn or control your impulses.

- Nicotine can even train your brain to be more easily addicted to other drugs like meth and cocaine.

- I don't say this to scare you, but I want you to have the facts because nothing is more important to me than your health and safety.

Aren't e-cigarettes safer than conventional cigarettes?

- Because your brain is still developing, scientific studies show that it isn't safe for you to use any tobacco product that contains nicotine, including e-cigarettes.

- Whether you get nicotine from an e-cigarette or a cigarette, it's still risky.

- Some e-cigarette batteries have even exploded and hurt people.

You used tobacco, so why shouldn't I?

- If I could live my life over again, I never would have started smoking. I learned that people who smoke cigarettes are much more likely to develop, and die from, certain diseases than people who don't smoke. This was really scary, so I quit smoking.

- Quitting was really hard, and I don't want you to go through that. The best thing is to not start at all.

FOR MORE TIPS IN A PDF FORMAT, GO TO

https://e-cigarettes.surgeongeneral.gov/documents/SGR_ECig_ParentTipSheet_508.pdf

Free resource for educators: CATCH (Coordinated Approach To Child Health) worked with the University of Texas Health Science Center to develop a free curriculum called CATCH My Breath, a prevention program aimed at middle and high school students regarding using e-cigarettes.

To learn more, go to <https://catchinfo.org/modules/e-cigarettes/>.

Although the makers of e-cigs deny that they are targeting youth, opponents argue otherwise.

"With Juul and other e-cigarettes, the marketing is something that can't be ignored as well," Wexler said. "Especially on social media, they're finding where the kids are, and they're posting photos of these very attractive-looking people using their products, making it seem like life seems better when you use these products, using sexy models." These are the same tactics that cigarette manufacturers used in advertising that's now banned by the government, Wexler pointed out.

The most popular arenas for these posts seem to be Instagram and YouTube, with adolescents themselves doing a lot of the posting of photos and videos, not just the manufacturers, Wexler noted.

In recent months, Juul has been getting a lot of media attention because school principals across the country (including Upstate New York) are reporting a surge in usage.

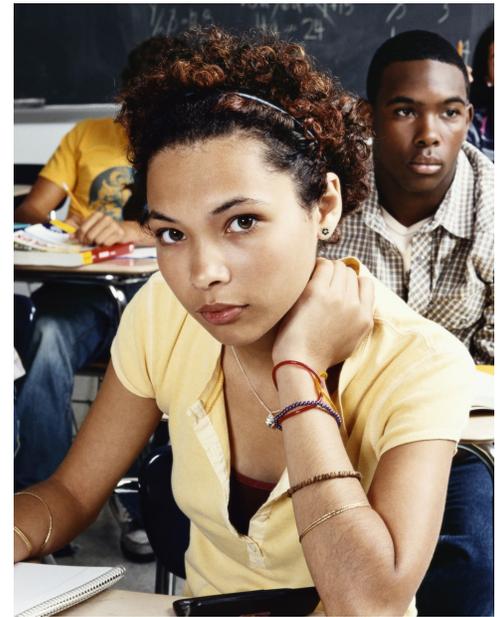
In April, a variety of organizations including the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Lung As-

sociation, along with the Campaign for Tobacco Free-Kids, sent a letter to Dr. Scott Gottlieb, commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, seeking immediate action to protect young people from Juul e-cigs. These groups claim that Juul "appears to deliver nicotine more quickly, effectively and at higher doses than other e-cigarettes, increasing users' risk of addiction."

U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer of New York held a press conference in May with educators, parents and teens in Monroe County. He demanded that the FDA put an end to kid-friendly flavors and marketing by e-cigarette manufacturers.

E-cigarettes can be found in more than 8,000 flavors. A 2016 report from the U.S. Surgeon General showed that youth try and use e-cigarettes out of curiosity, for flavor and taste, and based on the belief that they are less harmful than other tobacco products.

New York State prohibits selling cigarettes and e-cigarettes to minors (under age 18) but 14 counties and New York City require purchasers to be at least 21, according to the New York State Department of Health.



Like smoking tobacco cigarettes, using e-cigarettes also is prohibited in public spaces, schools, and so on. Nationally, some schools are installing specialized sensors to detect the e-cigarette vapors in restrooms; other schools are teaching the dangers of e-cigarettes in health classes, according to the Wall Street Journal.

Jane Sutter is a Rochester-based freelance writer.

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community should be aware of who our elders are."

If a person observes some troubling behavior or lifestyle, what can he or she do? "It would really be good to gain the trust of the person at first because an elderly person isn't going to take kindly to a person nosing around their business," Sansevero said.

As trust is gained, you can offer to help clean out spoiled food from the refrigerator and help them put dates on new food that goes into it. If clutter is an issue and causing tripping hazards, you can offer to help sort out old newspapers and magazines for the recycle bin. If they're having trouble paying bills on time, you can suggest they hire a bookkeeper. "You can help them create systems to support their independence but also be flagging some of the safety issue," Sansevero said.

Finding out if the elder has family involved is key. If you have serious con-

cerns and you don't know how to contact family, an option is to contact the elder's physician (whose name you can get from a prescription bottle). Although confidentiality would prevent the doctor's office from sharing information with you, you can share your concerns and see if the office will pass them on to the senior's emergency contact. Sansevero suggested the concerned person say something like: "I'm a friend of so-and-so and I've been a friend for a period of time. I noticed a little bit of slip in how she's taking care of herself, and I just wanted to flag it."

If the elder has the mental capacity to make decisions but is just making poor decisions, then that's his right to do so and there's not much anyone can do, Sansevero said.

"If you are really worried about the elder and you feel they are in danger to themselves or another, you can report it

... that will initiate a visit by a case worker to see if it's indicated, Sansevero said." In New York State, the Department of Adult Protective Services in each county would be the contact.

Experts who work with the elderly believe the problem of elder self-neglect is likely to grow. According to the Institute on Aging, nearly one-third (11.3) older adults lived alone in 2010. And the number of Americans with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias is expected to nearly triple, from 5.7 million to as many as 16 million in 2050, according to the Alzheimer's Association.

That means more watchful eyes are needed. "It's really important to have others who can be eyes and ears in the community for our vulnerable seniors," Sansevero said.

Jane Sutter is a Rochester-based freelance writer.



ROMAN CATHOLIC
DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER

Creating a Safe Environment Newsletter

is published quarterly by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester with the aim of helping all of us keep children and vulnerable adults safe at home, at church and in all places in our community.

Comments can be directed to:
Karen Rineferd,
Diocesan Coordinator
of Safe Environment Education
and Compliance,
585-328-3228, ext. 1255
or Karen.Rineferd@dor.org.

Victims of sexual abuse by any employee of the Church should always report to the civil authorities.

To report a case of possible sexual abuse and to receive help and guidance from the

Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester, contact the diocesan Victim Assistance Coordinator:

Deborah Housel
(585) 328-3228, ext. 1555;
toll-free 1-800-388-7177,
ext. 1555
victimsassistance@dor.org.

All photos in this newsletter are for illustrative purposes only.

ADDITIONAL SAFETY RESOURCES

ONLINE SAFETY RESOURCES

CHILDREN & TEENS' SAFETY SITES:

Webonauts Internet Academy:

<http://pbskids.org/webonauts/>

PBS Kids game that helps younger children understand the basics of Internet behavior and safety.

NSTeens:

<http://www.nsteens.org/>

A program of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that has interactive games and videos on a variety of Internet safety topics.

FOR PARENTS:

Common Sense Media

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/parent-concerns>

A comprehensive and frequently updated site that is packed with resources. Dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing information and education

Family Online Safety Institute:

<http://www.fosi.org/>

iKeepSafe:

<http://www.ikeepsafe.org/>

Resources for parents, educators, kids and parishes on navigating mobile and social media technologies

Faith and Safety:

<http://www.faithandsafety.org>

Safety in a digital world, a joint project of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Greek Orthodox Church in America

LOCAL RESOURCES AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Bivona Child Advocacy Center
(Monroe, Wayne counties):
www.BivonaCAC.org
585-935-7800

Chemung County Child Advocacy Center:
607-737-8449
www.chemungcounty.com

Child Advocacy Center of Cayuga County:
315-253-9795
www.cacofcayugacounty.org

Finger Lakes Child Advocacy Program
(Ontario County):
www.cacfingerlakes.org
315-548-3232

Darkness to Light organization:
www.d2l.org

STEBEN COUNTY: Southern Tier Children's Advocacy Center:
www.sthcs.org
716-372-8532

NYS State Central Registry
(Child Abuse Reporting Hotline):
1-800-342-3720

NYS Child Advocacy Resource and Consultation Center (CARCC)
866-313-3013

Tompkins County Advocacy Center:
www.theadvocacycenter.org
607-277-3203

Wyoming County Sexual Abuse Response Team:
585-786-8846

Yates County Child Abuse Review Team:
315-531-3417, Ext. 6