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# OPINION

**LAST WEEK'S POLL RESULTS**  
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## NEWS-JOURNAL EDITORIAL

# Cases of elder abuse too often not reported

The National Council on Aging, or NCOA, reports approximately 1-in-10 Americans over age 60 have experienced some form of elder abuse. Some estimates range as high as 5 million elders who are abused each year. Another study estimates just 1-in-14 cases of abuse are reported to authorities.

Elder abuse includes physical, emotional, sexual and financial abuse, exploitation, neglect and abandonment. As is reported in this week's News-Journal, perpetrators can include children, other family members, spouses as well as staff at nursing homes, assisted living and other facilities, according to the NCOA.

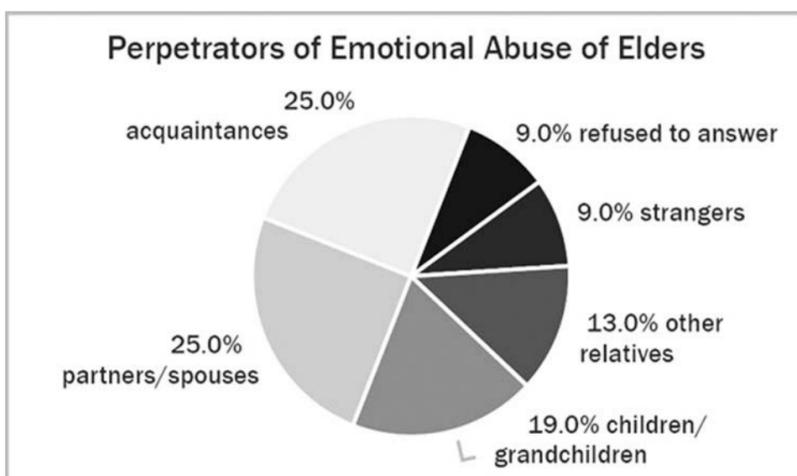
Social isolation and mental

impairment such as dementia or Alzheimer's disease are two factors that make older adults vulnerable to abuse. Recent studies show nearly half of those with

dementia experienced abuse or neglect. Interpersonal violence also occurs at disproportionately higher rates among adults with disabilities.

The NCOA urges people to look for warning signs of elder abuse such as bruises, pressure marks, broken bones, abrasions, burns, an unexplained withdrawal from normal activities, a sudden change in alertness or unusual depression; strained or tense relationships; frequent arguments between the caregiver and older adult, sudden changes in financial situations, bedsores, unattended medical needs, poor hygiene, unusual weight loss belittling, threats, or other uses of power and control by individuals.

Anyone who suspects an older adult is in immediate, life-threatening danger should call the police or the department of social services.



## COLUMN

### A heartfelt farewell

Apparently, there was no way of preventing it. If I had knee pads I would have worn them out begging Cindy Lindsey not to retire. Alas, that day has come.

It's been 20 months since I became editor and publisher of the News-Journal and subsequently how long I have known Cindy.

She was integral in making my transition into my new position in a new town an easy one.

Although it's no secret she's an asset to this newspaper, she's even more of an asset to our community.

Name a board and she's currently on it or has been. She is constantly doing things that show how she is as a person, not just an advertising representative. Whether it's cleaning up downtown Spruce Pine or spending a few hours each Monday with the Roan Readers, Cindy is truly one of those people we only meet a few times in our lives.

I wish I could have known her longer. She has spent more than 20 years at this newspaper and in turn has become the office's "answer person." Need to know who is related? Ask Cindy. What business used to be in that building? Ask Cindy.

Her character, work ethic and personality are second-to-none and she



**Brandon ROBERTS**

has an infectious laugh that brightens an entire room.

Although I am among the drove of people that wish her retiring wasn't the case, that day has come.

The News-Journal will go on without her, but I think we all wish it could go on with her. Although it is cliché to say her replacement has some big shoes to fill, it also happens to be the truth.

I am glad I got to know Cindy Lindsey even though our time together at the News-Journal is but a blip on her timeline here.

But I, just as everyone else in Mitchell County, can rest easy knowing she is still part of this community.

Thank you, Cindy, for all you have done for the News-Journal and Mitchell County.

You will be missed.

**Brandon Roberts is editor and publisher of the News-Journal. He can be reached at editor@mitchellnews.com, by calling 828-765-7169 or at the News-Journal office at 261 Locust St. in Spruce Pine.**

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Resident thanks Lions Club

**Dear editor:**  
I want to take a moment to thank the Lions Club of Spruce Pine.

I am legally blind and in July they sponsored me and my friend Marie Buchanan to go to Camp Dogwood. We had a fantastic time and were very excited about attending the fishing tournament for the first time also.

I can't thank the Lions Club enough for what they do for the hearing and visually impaired in our community. The work the Lions Club do has truly blessed me and I would encourage everyone who can to support this club by joining or buying tickets or brooms.

Thank you all again.

**Georgia Stamey**  
Spruce Pine



## LETTERS POLICY

The Mitchell News-Journal welcomes letters to the editor about issues of local importance. Deadline to submit a letter for publication in the coming week's edition is 5 p.m. Friday. All writers are expected to abide by the following policy:

- Letters must be exclusive to the News-Journal;
- Letters must include the writer's full name, street address and daytime telephone number for verification. The writer's name and city of residence will be published – names cannot be withheld;

- Letters must be original – no photocopies;
- Letters should be 500 words or fewer;
- We do not publish poems, excerpts from other publications, lengthy submissions of scripture or letters signed by groups or multiple individuals;
- Letters endorsing or criticizing a business will not be published;
- We reserve the right to edit letters for brevity, style and libel. Publication of any letter is at the sole discretion of the Mitchell News-Journal.

## GUEST COLUMN

### What's our hospital's future? Mission gives some answers

Mission Health's decision to close the labor and delivery unit at Blue Ridge Regional Hospital scared many people in our communities. Would we lose more services? Was the hospital on the road to closing, as so many rural hospitals have?

Since that time, a group of concerned citizens has worked hard to make sure our counties are not stripped of more vital medical services. The group, called Sustaining Essential and Rural Community Healthcare, or SEARCH, has tried to get answers from Mission's leaders and to bring home to them how important the hospital is to our quality of life.

As part of that effort, SEARCH submitted a list of questions to Mission CEO Ron Paulus and met with him and other Mission and BRRH leaders. The questions looked to the future, asking if more changes lie ahead and how members of the community can affect the hospital's future.

This article lays out Mission's responses to several key questions. Our aim in passing on this information is to inform the public of Mission's stance and to stimulate a wider discussion about what people want and need in their hospital and in their medical services generally.

We hope more people will join that discussion and become active in SEARCH as we work for the health of our region. SEARCH's next meeting is 7 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 9, at Trinity Episcopal Church in Spruce Pine. All are welcome.

The gist of what Mission's leaders told us is this: They plan to keep operating Blue Ridge and think it can stay afloat financially. But there will be changes in the services available and the way care is delivered. One change already in place is a



**Victoria HICKS**

surgeon will not be available nights and weekends. Patients who need emergency surgery during those times will be transported to other Mission hospitals.

Mission says so few emergency surgeries are performed at Blue Ridge it doesn't make sense to have a surgeon available 24/7. Instead, the hospital will concentrate on surgeries scheduled in advance, particularly outpatient surgeries.

Blue Ridge is also cutting back on the hours during which a Mission-employed doctor is on-site to oversee inpatient care. In Mission's system, a patient whose regular doctor is a Mission employee is overseen during inpatient hospital stays by a different Mission-employed doctor, a "hospitalist," trained to manage care in a hospital setting.

Starting in January, a hospitalist will only be present at Blue Ridge from 7 a.m.-11 p.m. At other times, doctors supplied by a contractor, Eagle Telemedicine, will consult as-needed via video technology. They will be board certified in internal medicine and may be based anywhere in the United States. (None of this affects patients whose regular doctors are not Mission employees.)

Many people refer to telemedicine as using "robots," but it is more like using Skype or FaceTime. With cameras and video screens, the nurse or physician's assistant who is at the patient's bedside shares

information with and receives instruction from the doctor who is farther away. Eagle Telemedicine has several videos on YouTube showing how the service works.

Mission also intends to increase the number of primary care doctors who practice in the Mauzy Phillips building. This is in keeping with its overall strategy of bringing more doctors into its own network where they are more subject to its rules.

Other areas slated for growth include outpatient surgery, diagnostic testing such as MRIs, CT scans and other imaging technologies, and "swing beds." Swing beds are used for patients from this area who were taken to Asheville for advanced treatment but can recuperate here.

With the closure of the labor and delivery unit, many people feared Mission's strategy was to gradually force all patients to go to Marion or Asheville for care. Mission's leaders say this is not the case. They say, except for especially complex, difficult or unpredictable cases, they hope to treat more patients locally rather than seeing them transferred to Asheville.

At this point, Mission says, both the volume of patients and the money they bring in are enough to keep Blue Ridge open. But they also note many things are uncertain, including the future of Medicare, Medicaid and the private health insurance system.

SEARCH is not agreeing with Mission by transmitting this information. We are merely reporting their responses as a public service. Clearly, there is much to be discussed and responded to.

**Victoria Loe Hicks is a retired journalist, a member of the SEARCH Media Relations Task Force and a resident of Mitchell County.**

## MITCHELL NEWS-JOURNAL

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### Our Mission

The Mitchell News-Journal is published with pride for the people of Mitchell and adjoining counties by Community Newspapers Inc., Athens, Georgia.

We believe strong newspapers build strong communities – "Newspapers get things done!" Our primary goal is to publish distinguished and profitable community-oriented newspapers.

This mission will be accomplished through the teamwork of professionals dedicated to truth, integrity, loyalty, quality and hard work.

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