

Public Relations

WSU's Institute of Gerontology director awarded for elder abuse research

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DETROIT – Peter Lichtenberg, Ph.D., director of the Institute of Gerontology at Wayne State University, won the Judge Edward Sosnick Courage to Lead Award for his extensive work to create ways of identifying older adults at risk of financial exploitation. The award is presented annually by the Oakland County SAVE (Serving Adults who are Vulnerable and/or Elderly) Task Force.

Financial exploitation of older adults is a rapidly growing problem affecting about one in 20 seniors each year. Lichtenberg created a set of scales and assessments of a person's ability to make sound, rational financial decisions and/or risk of being subject to undue influence. Initial studies confirm that the Lichtenberg Financial Decision-Making Screening and Rating Scales reliably profile an older adult's vulnerability to exploitation and ability to make significant financial decisions. Financial planners, bank personnel, lawyers, law enforcement officers and adult protective services employees would benefit from reliable methods to determine an older adult's capacity to make independent financial decisions.

"Peter was an easy choice for the award," said James Alexander, SAVE co-chair and Oakland County Circuit Court judge. "Implementation of the Lichtenberg rating and screening scales will further identify those at risk of financial exploitation, making us better able to stop the abuse at an early stage." The Courage to Lead Award recognizes a person who has taken a principal role in leading a campaign against elder abuse or had the courage to speak out against elder abuse and neglect in Michigan.

Lichtenberg said he was humbled to receive the award "because there are so many unsung heroes in the fight against elder abuse, many of them far more deserving. I deeply appreciate the support and recognition of our efforts to prevent the financial exploitation of older adults."

Details about the Lichtenberg Screening and Rating Scales can be found at iog.wayne.edu.

Lichtenberg's work is supported by a \$468,000 grant from the National Institute of Justice (GMS2014-MU-CX-0001) to validate the screenings and refine methods for wide-scale distribution of the assessment tools across multiple professions.

The Institute of Gerontology researches the aging process, educates students in gerontology, and presents programs on aging issues relevant to professionals, caregivers and older adults in the community (iog.wayne.edu). The Institute is part of the Division of Research at Wayne State University, one of the nation's preeminent public research institutions in an urban setting. For more information about research at Wayne State University, visit research.wayne.edu.

Contact: Cheryl Deep
Voice: 313-664-2607; 248-225-9474
Email: cheryldeep@wayne.edu
Fax: 313-875-0127
Website: www.iog.wayne.edu



5700 Cass Avenue, 3100 Academic Administration Building * Detroit, Michigan 48202
Phone (313) 577-2150 * Fax (313) 577-4459 * Newsline (313) 577-5345

