

PROBLEM GAMBLING IN OLDER ADULTS

I recently attended a conference entitled *Aging with Dignity* and listened to a panel presentation on “Problem Gambling Among Older Adults”. I listened to speakers from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling and an older gambler in recovery. We learned that gambling in older populations is on the rise; doubling in the past 25 years. Older adults may hide their problem gambling until they have gambled away their pension, savings and perhaps even their house. Cities and towns, civic and religious organizations run trips to the casinos making the activity seem like a form of entertainment. For most, gambling takes place with no ill effects. For a growing number, gambling can become or is a problem. How to recognize when gambling may be a problem? These are warning signs of problem gambling:

- gambling with money meant for other necessities
- gambling on credit
- borrowing from family or friends
- lying about or hiding gambling
- only talks about wins, not losses
- betting more than he/she can afford to lose

Problem gambling is a disorder, not unlike alcohol or drug addiction, and there is treatment available. The Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling has a Helpline: 1-800-426-1234. Treatment is available at the Boston ASAP Center: 617-482-5292.

“Gambling is not a risk free activity”, according to the Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling. Education can help older adults, who gamble, learn how to manage and lower the risk. For more information, you can contact the Council at 617-426-4554 or e-mail: gambling@aol.com or go to www.masscompulsivegambling.org. If you have concerns about your or another’s gambling, you can also call Kathy Laufer at 617-796-1663.