

# Family Caregiver Newsletter

Newsletter Date February 2014

## The Powerful Caregiver

*This column is named after the class "Powerful Tools for Caregivers," a six-session workshop on helping caregiving families thrive (not just survive). It is offered in Racine County several times a year.*

## Wandering Behaviors

*Patricia cares for her husband Allan, a retired principal who has vascular dementia. Allan will sometimes mention that he has to "go to a meeting." One day, he even put on his coat and hat and was about to go out the door. Patricia reassured him that the meeting had been changed, and she provided an alternate activity to get his mind off his work "responsibilities."*

*One late afternoon, Patricia comes upstairs after doing some laundry in the basement. The kitchen door is open, the car is not in the garage, and Allan is nowhere to be seen! Patricia's heart stops, then pounds in her chest. What has happened? What could happen? What can she do?*

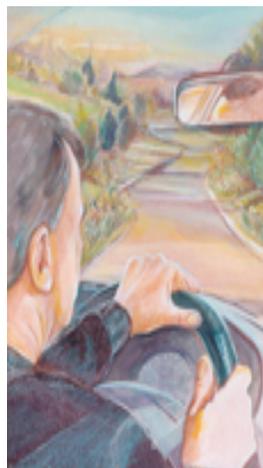
*Late at night a young man returning home sees a person lying on the edge of the street. He calls 911 and approaches the person, a frail woman who is barefoot, weeping, shivering and bleeding from her forehead. She keeps calling for "Mi hijo! Mi hijo!" Though it's*

*cold, she's clad only in a nightgown. Who is this woman, and how will her family be found?*

When a person with impaired thinking leaves a safe environment and becomes lost, it is referred to as "wandering" behavior. Some people think it's easy to tell whether a

particular person is "a wanderer," but it may happen without warning. Reasons for wandering are as varied as needing to find "home," going to a former job, looking for a relative from the past, escaping boredom or over stimulation, or extreme fear

of something real or imagined. Most (more than 60%) of people diagnosed with dementia will wander. Other conditions that may trigger wandering are undiagnosed medical conditions like urinary tract infection, pneumonia, or a neurological condition, or perhaps a change in



Images: National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, National Institutes of Health.

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location or environment.

Rather than waiting for your loved to earn the wanderer's badge, it's good to be prepared before the first incident, especially if certain behaviors are Present. A few of these are: coming back late from an outing, trying to carry out duties of a former job, seeming to be lost in a new or changed environment. Again, more than 60% of people who have dementia engage in wandering behavior at some time. We don't know who or when. It would be good to be prepared before the first time.

Here are a few strategies that can help prevent wandering behavior:

Validate perceptions and feelings instead of trying to correct them. Instead of telling Allan that he no longer works or attends meetings, Patricia simply said "The meeting time has been changed." Allan's sense of having an important role is intact, and he is ready to engage in another activity.

Provide activities and opportunities for movement, even simple tasks like folding laundry. Notice the most restless time of day and plan activities at that time. For instance, a common restless period is often just before supertime (this agitation is often called "sundowning.") Some caregivers find that offering a snack in a pleasant, calm environment is helpful.

Please look over the wealth of ideas and information on the enclosed flyer from the Alzheimer's Association.

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*How did the above incidents turn out? Well, fortunately the two family caregivers had used community*

*resources that can save lives!*

*Last year at the County Fair, Patricia and Allan enrolled in the Safe Assured ID program. Patricia called 9-1-1 and gave the authorities Allan's CD. An alert was put out, and an hour later Allan was found in a neighboring county dazed and frightened, but safe.*

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*Juan lives with and cares for his mother Maria who is elderly, frail, and forgetful. Juan has attended events for family caregivers, and when he heard about the MedicAlert/Safe Return program, he enrolled his mother. When he put the bracelet on her wrist, her eyes lit up because to her it was a gift from her son. Well, it certainly was a gift. The bracelet gave authorities the information they needed to contact Juan when his mother was found in the middle of the night. He met her at the hospital, where her wound was attended to and it was discovered that Maria had a urinary tract infection. Juan was amazed that his mother walked several blocks in the dark without her walker and assistance from him. The next day he called the Alzheimer's Association Helpline (800 272-3900) and got suggestions for other precautions he could take to keep her safe and sound.*



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## Submitting Medicaid Applications

Our Elderly Benefits Specialist had some very helpful suggestions to add to last month's newsletter article regarding submitting Medicaid applications:

- Put the applicant's Social Security number (or case number if one has been assigned) on every page of material being submitted
  - FAXing materials leaves a better "paper trail" than using regular mail.
- As soon as the transmission is complete, staple the FAX confirmation to the group of documents being sent. (There is a free FAX machine on the

1st floor of the Dennis Kornwolf County Building, 1717 Taylor Ave. Use the Workforce entrance).

- If you choose to use the U.S. Postal Service, NEVER SEND ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS. Make copies to submit and keep the originals. Also, use Certified Mail and request a signed receipt.
- Being responsible for someone's participation in Medicaid can be daunting, especially when added to many other caregiving tasks. You may want to consider having another person act as an Authorized Representative, who would be able to make inquiries and submit needed materials.



## Community Resources

This column highlights some of the many resources in our community. For more, see the Community Resource Directory available from the Aging and Disability Resource Center (262-833-8777) or [www.adrc.racineco.com](http://www.adrc.racineco.com).

### Safe Assured ID:

A mini CD captures physical characteristics and video footage that can be provided to law enforcement. Streaming video, digital voiceprint and photo, and fingerprints are taken. Private and sensitive data are encrypted, accessible only to law enforcement. This is offered through the Volunteer Center of Racine County. Enrollments are often held at group events around the County, or an appointment can be made at the Volunteer Center. Call them at 262-886-9612 for information, or check their website at: [http://www.volunteercenterofracine.org/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://www.volunteercenterofracine.org/index.php/Main_Page). This program is offered free to anyone over 55. For people who may object to being perceived as having dementia, their spouse can also enroll, and that takes the stigma away.

**MedicAlert + Safe Return** – is a 24-hour nationwide emergency response service for individuals with Alzheimer's or a

related dementia that wander or have a medical emergency. It is sponsored by the Alzheimer's Association and MedicAlert. There is an identification bracelet which may be worn with contact and medical information. Some people with dementia object to wearing the bracelet. This should not discourage you from using the program. There is still a lot it can do for you in a difficult situation. For information and an application, visit the Alzheimer's Association [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org) or MedicAlert <http://www.medicalert.org/products/ev everybody> websites or call 888-572-8566.

**Comfort Zone** – is a web-based GPS location management service. The subscriber makes choices about the range and extent of monitoring, and fees are charged accordingly. More information is available at <http://www.alz.org/comfortzone/> or by calling 877-259-4850.

*May I have...  
Serenity to  
accept the things  
I cannot change,  
Courage to  
change the things  
I can, and  
Wisdom to know  
the difference.*



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## Caregiver Opportunities

A three-week class called “**Caregiving Relationships**” will be offered on Saturday mornings at Atonement Lutheran Church beginning March 22<sup>nd</sup>. For more information and to register call Marilyn Joyce at 833-8764 or email [marilyn.joyce@goracine.org](mailto:marilyn.joyce@goracine.org).

Mary Finley, Outreach Specialist from the **Alzheimer’s Association**, will be available for family consultations on Wednesday, February 26th between 2 and 4 p.m. at the ADRC office located at 14200 Washington Ave (just west of I-94). This invitation is extended to those dealing with **any type of dementia**. For an appointment call Felicia Elias, 833-8761.

## Support Groups for Family Caregivers

**First Thursday 10:30 am-12 Noon**  
**Alzheimer’s Association Group**

**February 6**

For Families Dealing with Alzheimer’s and other Dementias  
Lincoln Lutheran Office Bldg, 2000 Domanik Drive, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor

**First Friday 12 Noon-1pm**

**“Caregiver Connection” Telephone Group**

**February 7**

Call 262-833-8762 to pre-register

**Second Tuesday 1:30-3:00 pm**

**February 11**

Yorkville United Methodist Church

17645 Old Yorkville Rd. (3 Miles West of I-94, Just N. of Highway 20)

**Second Saturday 10:30 am-12 Noon**

**February 8**

Atonement Lutheran Church

2915 Wright Ave

Park and enter in back of building (on South side).

**Third Wednesday 1:30-3:00 pm**

**February 19**

Burlington Senior Center, Eppers Room,  
209 N. Main St

**Third Thursday 6:00-7:30 pm**  
**Alzheimer’s Association Group**

**February 20**

For Families Dealing with Alzheimer’s and other Dementias  
Atonement Lutheran Church, 2915 Wright Ave  
Park and enter in back of building (on South side)