

Family Caregiver Newsletter

Newsletter Date June 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.

“Med Management”: Your Pharmaceutical Hat

Sally sighs and looks nervously at her watch as she waits in line to pick up medication for her dad (for the third time this week). She’s on her way home from work. After dropping off the meds and checking on her dad, she’ll pick up her son from soccer, make dinner for her family, help her children with homework, do some laundry and housework, and fall into bed, exhausted but hoping to “do it all” again tomorrow. Her dad’s memory isn’t what it used to be, and she worries about him taking his medicine correctly. She wonders how she’ll have time to set them up for him, call with reminders to take them, or even take responsibility for giving them herself several times a day.

Carl drives slowly through the fog to the drugstore. Earlier he called the doctor’s office to report that Clarissa, his wife of 45 years, who lives with Parkinson’s Disease, has been having more muscle stiffness lately. At home, he opens the bottle painfully with arthritic hands, uses his magnifying glass to read the instructions carefully, then adds the tiny pill to Clarissa’s evening dose. That makes 11 evening pills – 27 each day! Carl wonders how soon there will be other changes and how long he can manage caregiving. Duties and errands seem to consume him these days.

Most people with chronic health

conditions take medications on a regular basis. As time goes on, the caregiving family usually becomes more involved with making sure medications are taken correctly and have the desired effects. This can become a daunting task, and you will need help from family, friends, and community resources. This task often progresses by increments. The trick is to observe and plan for moving to the next stage.

Stages of medication management

The first level is often just getting the medicine to the person’s house. Many people start doing this chore without knowing they are becoming family caregivers. If trips to the pharmacy are adding undue stress to your life, other ways to accomplish this task are: using a pharmacy that delivers; using a mail order service; asking a trustworthy family member or friend to run this errand; or hiring an individual or agency to do so. During this first stage, you’ll want to be sure your loved one is taking his or her medication properly. Is he or she coping with barriers like memory loss, low vision, or mobility issues? You may want to check pill bottles and observe for intended effects. For instance, if someone is on a “water pill” and begins to have increased ankle swelling, it might indicate that medication is not being taken accurately.



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You may be ready for the next stage of “med management.”

Now the person you care for needs daily assistance to take medication as prescribed. Setting up medication ahead of time in boxes with a compartment for each dose is an effective way to make sure the right amount is available. The other job is making sure it is taken on time. A reminder call at dose time might be helpful. There are also services that will provide phone reminders, text messages, or a device that alarms at dose times. There is even a gadget that can be preloaded with the proper dosage that will alarm and dispense the medication needed and will call a designated person if the dose is not taken on time.

These devices depend on the user having a healthy short-term memory and mobility. Someone with dementia may not remember what an alarm means or may forget about the medication while getting a glass of water. So these are probably temporary solutions at best. This is a time for the wise caregiving family to make plans for more challenging times ahead. A call to the ADRC is a good first step.

The most intense stage of medication management is called medication administration. The person who does this takes responsibility for making sure the right medication is given at the right time. This falls on a family caregiver or some other willing person. Many home health agencies offer medication reminders but not medication administration. Those who do administration are generally higher priced, and they may have a minimum charge, e.g. one hour of service for each visit. That can quickly add up if there are several doses per day. Families sometimes divide this task, with each person being responsible for a certain dose.

When a person living independently needs total help with medications, however, it may be time to seriously consider whether that person is safe in the present living situation. Perhaps an Adult Day Program would be appropriate. The care-receiver may also need assistance with other Activities of Daily Living, and safety may be

a concern, so adult day care could be a cost effective option. The family caregiver would assist in the evening hours. Sometimes the assistance could be that a family member sets up medications ahead of time and a home care worker can give a reminder at the right time, perhaps along with an hour of personal care, housekeeping, or meal preparation.

Sally will want to monitor how well her dad follows his medication regimen and plan for more involvement as time goes on, reaching out for family help and community resources as much as possible.

Carl is already at the medication administration stage, yet he is still taking responsibility for getting medication to the house, even in inclement weather. He’s also wrestling with hard-to-open bottles and hard-to-read labels. He might want someone else to bring Clarissa’s medicine to the house and set the doses up ahead of time, or use a pharmacy that can pre-package the medications in dose packages.

Observing and Reporting

Part of the medication monitoring role is to be the everyday eyes and ears for the prescribing health care provider. This may include asking your care receiver about comfort level and other symptoms or just noticing indications of whether or not intended results are being achieved. For instance, if your care receiver has been drowsy lately, perhaps this is a side effect of a medication that needs to be adjusted. Dosage adjustments are a necessary part of the aging process. The older we get, the more sensitive our bodies are to medications. So don’t be shy about notifying the doctor or talking with the pharmacist about your observations.

Observation is especially important when there is a new medication. You’ll need to be alert for symptoms of allergy, as well as looking for intended effects and side effects. Common signs of allergy are hives, skin rash, itchy eyes, and runny nose. A rare but very serious reaction is known as anaphylactic shock. Symptoms are swelling around the mouth and throat, congestion, and difficulty breathing. This is an emergency situation. Call 911 immediately!

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If you note the milder symptoms of allergy, check with the doctor or pharmacist before giving the next dose.

A few common side effects of medications are digestive distress, muscle pain or weakness, drowsiness, dizziness, sleeping disturbance, and visual changes. Don't hesitate to talk with your health care professional if you note any new symptoms, old symptoms aren't going away, or "something just doesn't seem right." Of course, it's best to check with a professional before making any changes.

Recordkeeping

It's very important to have a current list of the person's medications as well as any allergies or other reasons for having discontinued medications in the past. Records can be kept on computer if preferred. TRIAD's File of Life program in Racine County gives out a packet containing a form on which to record pertinent medical information including meds. It can be hung on the refrigerator, and emergency personnel are trained to look for it there. It can also be used as an ongoing record of medications and should be taken to all medical appointments. You can use this record to discuss changes with the health care provider. You can also use it to make sure there are no inadvertent changes when

your care receiver moves to or from the hospital or a care facility.

Avoid "Polypharmacy"

This is a term that has two meanings: "many medications" and "several pharmacies." You may notice your list of medications getting longer and longer. This can be especially true when there is more than one prescribing health care provider. Make sure each provider is familiar with all medications your loved one is taking, and make sure you understand why each one is necessary. Your pharmacist is a great resource in assessing the medication regimen. That's why it's best to establish a working relationship with one pharmacy, and preferably a particular pharmacist whom you trust. He or she is a key member of your health care team.

Important Note!

These suggestions for good "med management" also apply to good caregiver self-care. Do not neglect giving attention to your own medication regimen as part of your own well-being, which, of course, is the kingpin in an effective Family Caregiving situation.



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

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 online at: www.adrc.racineco.com.

Contact the Aging and Disability Resource Center of Racine County to have the "File of Life" sent to you free of charge. 262-833-8777.

For other pharmacy and medication information see the Community Resource Directory beginning on page 74. It begins

with Pharmacies that deliver and goes through Prescription Drug Patient Assistance programs. You can also view the directory online at www.adrc.racineco.com under the Racine County Resources tab on the left. Staff at the ADRC are happy to assist with any questions.





14200 Washington Ave
Sturtevant, WI 53177

Caregiver Opportunities

Housing Options in Racine County Seminar held Tuesday June 17th from 3:00 to 4:00 p.m. at the Ives Grove County Building 14200 Washington Ave, Sturtevant, in the Auditorium. Call 833-8777 to register.

Savvy Caregiver Training Program coming June 10th. Look for more details at <http://www.alz.org/sewi> website. There is a copy of the flyer on the ADRC website where the caregiver news is located.

Mary Finley, Outreach Specialist from the **Alzheimer's Association**, will be available for family consultations on Wednesday, June 25th between 2 and 4 p.m. at the ADRC office located at 14200 Washington Ave. This invitation is extended to those dealing with **any type of dementia**. For an appointment call Felicia Elias, 262-833-8761.

Support Groups for Family Caregivers

First Thursday 10:30 am-12 Noon June 5th
Alzheimer's Association Group
For Families Dealing with Alzheimer's and other Dementias
Lincoln Lutheran Office Bldg, 2000 Domanik Drive, 4th Floor

First Friday 12 Noon-1pm (**day change June 13th** for June)
"Caregiver Connection" Telephone Group
Call 262-833-8762 to pre-register June 10th

Second Tuesday 1:30-3:00 pm
Yorkville United Methodist Church
17645 Old Yorkville Rd. (3 Miles West of June 14th I-94, Just N. of Highway 20)

Second Saturday 10:30 am-12 Noon
Atonement Lutheran Church,
2915 Wright Ave June 18th South
Park and enter in back of building (on side).

Third Wednesday 1:30-3:00 pm June 19th Room,
Burlington Senior Center, Eppers
209 N. Main St

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