



FAMILY CAREGIVER NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2011

Support Group and Event Information Inside

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

Family Meetings and "Peace on Earth"

Rosemary is a 90-year-old woman who lives in her own house in a small town in Wisconsin. She has diabetes and severe osteoporosis. She has had several falls, and her stature is stooped due to a fractured vertebra several years ago. Rosemary has always been a very capable, independent individual. She is a retired nurse who has devoted her career to helping older people stay out of nursing homes as long as possible.

Her son Tom and his wife Alice live a mile away, daughters Carol and Connie each live two hours away, and her son Pete lives in California. Tom and Alice check on Rosemary at least twice a day and bring her meals. They also accompany her to medical appointments, and do most of her housekeeping, laundry, and outdoor chores. Recently Rosemary has had some "accidents" on the way to her bathroom at night. She has also shown signs of beginning memory problems. Tom and Alice have health problems of their own and are feeling overwhelmed. They are too busy with everyday responsibilities to make plans for the future for Rosemary or themselves. They are hoping family members can offer some ideas and help.

When a person becomes chronically ill or frail, a family is called upon to become a team, working together for the common goal of safety and quality of life for their loved one. A good team needs an occasional "huddle"! Many extended families get together for holidays. This is a good time to plan for a family meeting.

When families meet for a team meeting, there can be humor, fun, and productive planning – and..well...disagreement or bickering. Most family groups carry the seeds of such conflict. This brief article holds no magic to dissolve the angst. It simply gives some general ideas that may help in team- building.

Here are a few suggestions from various people with expertise and experience that may help to make your family meeting pleasant and productive:

- Invite everyone concerned, including the care receiver whenever possible.
- Remember that people can join the group by phone, email, or video-chatting e.g. Skype.
- Have an agenda, a list of issues that need discussion
- Meet at a neutral location.
- Remind people to let go of any “baggage” from past during this meeting. Ask them to focus on present needs and future plans for the well-being of the loved one in need.
- Start the meeting by having each person briefly state their concerns and hopes for the family member (and the primary caregiver(s)) and what help they can offer.
- Convey your ideas in “I” messages, e.g. “It seems to me that we need to...” rather than holding out your ideas as the only “right” ones.
- As each issue is discussed, make a list of possible solutions and then choose one that seems to be the best option available at this time.
- Write down plans that are made and give each person a copy.
- Discuss how to communicate with each other to evaluate how well the plan is working, so that you can “tweek” it as needed.

Then, **go out for ice cream** (or do something else fun as a family) because life and family are precious!

Tom and Alice ask for a family meeting over the holidays while Carol and Connie are in town. Pete says his mother “seems fine” when he calls her, and he doesn’t seem to think there needs to be a “big meeting thing.” However, he agrees to join by Skype. Tom and Alice’s daughter Jodi attends the meeting, and her daughter Sarah who is at a nearby college, joins the group by phone.

Alice and Tom email their agenda ideas to the others, asking that everyone add any topics they would like to discuss. They also tell Rosemary about the meeting and ask what she would like to talk about. She says she doesn’t see the need for a meeting, but

agrees that it will be good to have her children all “together”, and as long as they are talking, the back door needs painting. By email the family agrees on a meeting time at Rosemary’s house.

The meeting goes quite smoothly. Rosemary is obviously warmed by the expressions of care and concern from her family. She repeats herself a lot and forgets what people have said.. Pete in CA begins to see that there is reason to be concerned about his mother’s safety and Tom and Alice’s stress level. He offers to pay for yard work and snow removal and says he will visit for a week soon to do what he can.

Carol and Connie decided to take turns spending week-ends with their Mom. Rosemary’s granddaughter will inquire about her attending Harmony Club a few days a month, and she will arrange for Meals on Wheels on other days. She also buys a bedside commode so that Rosemary will not have to get to the bathroom at night. Sarah at college will arrange to have a Personal Emergency Response System installed so that Rosemary can summon help when needed. Tom and Alice decide to call the Aging and Disability Resource Center for Options Counseling to find out what other help is available for Rosemary’s present and future needs.

The family agrees to email or Skype once a week to keep in touch and make further plans as necessary. They decide that when Pete comes to town, they will plan a meeting at their favorite restaurant. Then the people who are at Rosemary’s have dessert together!!

Community Resources for Caregiving Families

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 (638-6800 or www.adrc.racineco.com).

Do you know a senior who is lonely? Do you sometimes feel shut in with your care receiver? The **Senior Companion Program** is a community service provided by the Dominicans at Siena Center. They provide volunteers to be friendly visitors to people who aren’t able to get out much, including caregivers. The program coordinator matches visitors and recipients after an interview to make sure the program is appropriate for each individual. Senior Companions don’t provide physical care or do chores. Their gifts are human presence and attention. For further information call 262-639-4100 or visit: <http://www.racinedominicans.org/pages/senior.cfm>

From the Caregiver Library

Caring for Your Aging Parents by Virginia Morris

Good information on family meetings and many, many other issues.

To borrow this book, call: **833-8764**

SUPPORT GROUPS FOR FAMILY CAREGIVERS

First Friday 10:30AM-12Noon

Alzheimer's Association Group – DEC. 2

For Families Dealing with Alzheimer's and other Dementias

Lincoln Lutheran Office Building, 2000 Domanik Drive
4th Floor (Enter through door on west side of building)

Second Tuesday 1:30-3:00 pm

DEC. 13

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

Second Saturday 10:30AM-12N

DEC. 10

Mount Pleasant Lutheran Church, 1700 S. Green Bay Road

Third Wednesday 1:30-3:00 PM

DEC. 21

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

Third Thursday DEC 15

Lunch Hour (12 to 1) "Brown Bag" group:

1717 Taylor Ave., County Service Bldg., 3 South Conference Room

Alzheimer's Association Group 6:00-7:30 PM

For Families Dealng with Alzheimer's and other Dementias

Mount Pleasant Lutheran Church, 1700 S. Green Bay Road
1700 S. Green Bay Road

May December bring you peace, pleasant memories, food fun, and some FUN!

Be blessed as you bless others!

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