



FAMILY CAREGIVER NEWSLETTER JULY 2012

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

Herb, 80, has osteoarthritis in his hips, knees, and spine. Despite a lot of pain and poor mobility, Herb goes to doctor appointments alone. His primary physician sends him to a specialist, who prescribes a strong medication for the pain and inflammation. Herb is in a lot of discomfort, so he goes to a pharmacy that is on his way home instead of the one he usually uses. As soon as he gets home, he starts his new medicine as well as the Ibuprofen he has been taking all along. Herb feels better at first, but as time goes on, he becomes weak and lethargic and has abdominal pain. Herb's wife also notices that he is pale. She decides to call the doctor. It turns out that Herb is anemic due to bleeding in his digestive tract. The doctor and pharmacist didn't know that Herb was taking Ibuprofen, an over-the-counter drug with the same intended effects and side effects as his new prescription.

Sarah age 72, has been diagnosed with early dementia, Alzheimer's type. She lives in her own condo and enjoys tending her container garden. Sarah has been on thyroid medication for many years to regulate her metabolism. Her doctor prescribes one of the anticholinergic medications to help keep her healthy brain cells working at their best. Her functioning improves at first, but several months later her daughter Renee notices that her mother is sleeping much of the time, has difficulty carrying on a conversation, and isn't taking care of her beloved flowers. Alarmed, she calls the doctor, who asks, "Is she taking her medication?" When Renee looks at the pill bottles, she discovers that Sarah has missed many doses. Renee knows that she needs to take an active role in managing her mother's medications. Sarah won't hear of it

One of the most important aspects of caregiving is medication management. This includes knowing:

- ✓ What drugs are prescribed for your care receiver,
- ✓ The reason for each drug,
- ✓ Over-the-counter drugs and supplements he or she may be taking,
- ✓ Symptoms of allergic reaction, side effects, and drug interactions,
- ✓ Signs that the medication has its intended effect and how soon improvement can be expected.
- ✓ Whether your care receiver is taking medicine appropriately by herself,
- ✓ How and when to talk about letting you have a hand in managing the medicine.

That's a lot of responsibility! And we can add multiple calls to doctors, pharmacists, and other health care professionals if we need to report observations or ask for changes. Here is some information that may be helpful at various points along your caregiving journey.

Some Principles for Medication Management

Be sure all doctors and other health care providers are aware of all medications a person is receiving (including over-the-counter and supplemental preparations). Keep a complete, current list and take it with you to appointments. Also have it where it can be easily accessed by others caring for your loved one. Health care providers need all of this information, as there are many medications which cause adverse effects when taken together (called drug interactions). This can cause very serious symptoms.

Use only one pharmacy. Pharmacists have specialized training in medications and drug interactions. They keep records and flag accounts as necessary for possible problems.

Consult with the pharmacist about any concerns, questions, expected effects, what to watch out for, and special instructions. You may find a pharmacist more accessible and less hurried than a doctor.

Know and understand any special instructions. These may include whether or not to take a pill with food; whether to avoid certain foods, beverages, or exposure to sunlight; how to store the medication; and whether to avoid any over-the-counter preparations.

Watch for changes and record your observations from day to day. Is the desired effect being achieved? Is there a new problem?

Be alert for signs of an allergic reaction. Some signs of an allergic reaction are rash, itching, swelling, digestive disturbances e.g. pain, vomiting or diarrhea. Stop the drug and call the doctor.

NOTE: The most severe sign of allergy is Anaphylactic Shock, which brings swelling in the mouth, face, and neck and difficulty breathing. **CALL 911 immediately if you notice this reaction.** Give a current list of medication to rescue personnel.

Be aware of unwanted side effects: Some common ones are drowsiness, agitation, increased dementia or confusion, digestive disturbances, and headache. Consult with the pharmacist and/or the prescribing health professional.

Report changes in condition – dosages may need “tweaking”, especially as people become older and more sensitive to medication.

When Help Is Needed

Sometimes people need reminders to take medication properly, and at other times medication administration is needed. A reminder can be done by phone, in person, or even a device installed in the home. Phone and alarm reminders require the care receiver to be able to reach the medication, see well enough to get the right dosage, complete the task of taking that dose, and then remember that it has been taken. Some alarm devices can be preloaded with the right dose so that the person just needs to know that the alarm means to go to the dispenser, retrieve the medication, and take it. No more pills are available until the next dose time. In-person reminders ensure that the medicine is actually taken, and help can be provided e.g. assistance in opening bottles. When the person helping actually gives the medication that is called administration. Reminders and administration are two very different roles for a home health agency. Only home care workers with special training can administer medicines. Not all home health agencies offer medication administration, so it’s important to ask questions before choosing an agency.

For either reminders or administration it’s convenient to have doses set up ahead of time in a holder with slots for each dose. These are commonly called “pill minders” and can be purchased at any drugstore. Health-minded organizations (including the ADRC) give them away at events.

Medication management is a caregiving chore that must be done over and over. Many families find it

helpful to divide this duty among family members. This requires good communication and setting up a schedule of who gives which dose. A family can form a Care Team to coordinate these efforts, or there are websites like Lotsa Helping Hands which can help coordinate such a chore. For assistance in forming a Care Team call Ruth Stauersbol at 262-833-8762, or for more information.

Herb has overdosed on anti-inflammatory medications, which have a side effect of irritation and bleeding in the digestive system. If the new pharmacist had known Herb better she may have caught this and advised Herb to stop the Ibuprofen. Herb's condition improves, and from now on he and his wife will pay more attention to managing their medication.

Renee talks with Sarah's doctor, who confirms that she must take a more active role in managing Sarah's medications. He explains that this is a matter of safety and that the need will increase as time goes on. Renee tells her mother that the doctor says she must make sure Sarah takes her medicine every day. Sarah is angry for awhile, but soon Renee's help becomes part of her daily routine. Over the next several years, Renee's role progresses gradually from reminders to giving Sarah her medication and making sure she swallows every dose. During that time Sarah also needs changes in her living situation. Difficulty managing medication can be one sign that it may not be safe for an older person to live alone much longer.

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

Consult your **Community Resources Directory** for these resources:

Home Health Agencies (pp. 18-23) – medication services vary from agency to agency, as to family situations. You must call several agencies and see if they can offer the service you need. This would be a good chore for someone other than a primary caregiver!

Prescription Medication Services (“devices”) p. 75

Prescription Drug Patient Assistance (“help paying for medication”) – p. 77

If the person needing the medicine has a very low income, the Elderly Benefits Specialist may have some useful information regarding prescription assistance.

Caregiver Support Specialists at the ADRC can help you with questions about medication management. Call 638-6800 and ask for Senior Services.

File of Life is a magnetic packet in which to keep medical records (including prescription information) on your refrigerator. You can take it with you to medical appointments, and emergency responders are trained to look for it there. Call Felicia Elias at 262-833-8761 to receive one by mail.

Support Groups For Family Caregivers

First Thursday 10:30 am-12Noon

Alzheimer's Association Group – JULY 5

For Families Dealing with Alzheimer's and other Dementias

Lincoln Lutheran Office Building, 2000 Domanik Drive, 4th Floor

Second Tuesday 1:30-3:00 pm

JULY 10

Yorkville United Methodist Church

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

Second Saturday 10:30 am–12N

JULY 14

Mount Pleasant Lutheran Church, 1700 S. Green Bay Road

Third Wednesday 1:30-3:00 pm

JULY 18

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

Third Thursday 6:00-7:30 pm

Alzheimer's Association Group

JULY 19

For Families Dealing with Alzheimer's and other Dementias

Mount Pleasant Lutheran Church, 1700 S. Green Bay Road

1700 S. Green Bay Road

NEW!!! The first telephone Caregiver Support Group for Racine County will be held on July 17th from 12 Noon -1 pm. Our topic will be "Managing Caregiver Stress." Call 262-833-8762 or 833-8764 to register.

Other Events for Caregiving Families

Paulette Kisse, Outreach Specialist, will be available for two **family consultations** on Wednesday **July 25th**, between 2 and 4 pm. at the Ives Grove County Building, 14200

Washington Avenue. Sturtevant

For an appointment call **Felicia Elias, 833-8761**

Caring for Ourselves and Others

A workshop and retreat for family caregivers

Tuesday, August 14, 10 AM- 3 pm

Yorkville United Methodist Church

(See accompanying flyer)

Summertime

During summertime, please be sure that you and your loved one are well-hydrated. Drink lots, mostly water! Take slow, belly breaths, and enjoy summer aromas while you sip on a healthy beverage.

**Marilyn Joyce, Caregiver Support Specialist,
Aging and Disability Resource Center of Racine County**

262- 833-8764 marilyn.joyce@goracine.org