



FAMILY CAREGIVER NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 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

Safe At Home?

Tilly is 88 years young and lives in the home she has occupied for over 60 years. She takes medication for osteoporosis and high blood pressure and uses eye drops because of glaucoma. She does yard work, has wonderful flower gardens, and is active in her community. Because of visual difficulty Tilly has decided to stop driving and use the local ITN (Independent Transportation Network). She also allows her niece Karen to set up her medications once a week. Beyond that, Tilly is fiercely independent. Karen bothers her every so often by suggesting a Personal Emergency Response System, telling Tilly that her cute little throw rugs are a fall hazard, and urging her to get ugly safety stuff in her bathroom. So far she has been able to dismiss these well-meaning hints. One day, though, Tilly bends over to pull a stubborn weed in the backyard rose garden, when she loses her balance and falls, banging her right hip on the concrete sidewalk. No one hears her call for help for several hours.

Carlos has vascular dementia. As a result of some small, undetected strokes, he has lost some of his reasoning ability and visual perception. His wife Juanita helps him take care of his daily needs, drives him wherever he needs to go, and does most everything Carlos used to do to maintain their home.

She has noticed that Carlos stumbles frequently as he moves about the house. This morning as she was helping him step over the side of the bathtub, he fell, and they both landed on the floor. They each had a few bruises but were otherwise unhurt. However, this was a “wake-up call”! She calls her daughter, who has been wanting her to “make the house safer” for some time. Now Juanita says, “OK, I’m ready for some help.”

A fall is always a big surprise! Yet here are some facts that show falls as an all-too-common occurrence.

- Every year, one in three people over the age of 65 has a fall.
- Falls are particularly concerning for people who have osteoporosis and are thus more prone to fractures. Half of all women and one in four men over age 50 will have an osteoporosis-related

fracture in their lifetime.

- A high number of injuries from falls are hip fractures, which can particularly disastrous.
- Twenty-four per cent of people over 50 who suffer hip fractures die within a year; and 25% will require long-term care.

This means that safety precautions are a BIG DEAL for older folks. Why, then, do so many resist suggestions and expressions of concern from their families?

There are several reasons for their protest: cost, denial, and power struggles to name a few. People don't want to perceive themselves as old or vulnerable. Many 90-somethings stay away from places where "all those old people" are! A discussion with an older relative about safety precautions is more likely to get better results if it builds on strengths instead of weakness. Also, a conversation that becomes a battle of wills is usually useless.

Karen could say to Tilly: "If you don't get Lifeline and some help in that garden, you're going to break your hip and end up in a nursing home!" Tilly will probably feel hurt, devalued, and angry. She may devote the rest of her life to proving Karen wrong in this and other matters.

Here's a more inviting opening: "I so love your flower gardens, Aunt Tilly. I want you to keep on doing the things you enjoy for a long time. I worry about a serious accident, though. Could we talk about some safety precautions at home?" This approach is more likely to lead to some helpful changes.

The truth is that sometimes it takes a good scare or a crisis to motivate change. We must remember that anyone who makes their own decisions has a right to take risks. Concerned families cannot blame themselves for every accident. Neither is it productive to get lost in thoughts of "Woulda-Coulda-Shoulda" or "What If and If Only." Things happen. No one is ever 100% safe. All we can do is stay informed of what's sensible and available and communicate as effectively as possible. Then we do our best and hope for the best - 100% safe.

Two capable, concerned staff members of the ADRC have put together the enclosed **Home Safety Checklist and Tips**. Read it and see how Tilly, Carlos, and Juanita might have good outcomes to their stories.

September has been declared **Falls Prevention Month** in Wisconsin, where the incidence of falls has been ranked one of the highest in the United States. One of the initiatives to overcome this dubious distinction is a 7-part class called "**Stepping On**". See the accompanying flyer and consider participating and pursuing a fall-free lifestyle.

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)

Personal Emergency Response Systems: (See *Community Resource Directory* p. 72) – These provide electronic equipment which connects individuals with sources of emergency assistance. Some systems can detect a call for help from outside the home.

www.ThisCaringHome.org gives a virtual tour of a home with practical suggestions to for the safety and security of a person with dementia. Many of the suggestions are helpful for anyone.

Skillbank is an organization of seniors helping seniors. People over 60 years of age provide services to other seniors in need of help to maintain safe and independent living. Services are provided at a very reasonable cost. This is an excellent option for jobs that require a ladder, lifting and toting, and expertise (e.g. installing safety devices, gardening, or maintenance. Phone: **262-898-8900** or look online at www.lincolnlutheran.com/CSSkillbank.html .

Center for Independent Living – offers home safety suggestions to help seniors and people with disabilities to live independently as safely and as long as possible. www.societysassets.org
Phone: **262-637-9128** Ask for Independent Living Specialist.

Call the Aging and Disability Resource Center or consult the *Community Resource Directory* for more ideas.

Support Groups for Family Caregivers

Racine County Telephone Caregiver Group 12N-1PM **SEPT. 7**

Do you want support from other caregivers and a Caregiver Support Specialist but can't attend a support group? Perhaps this is due to work schedule, caregiving responsibilities, or transportation issues? You may enjoy this opportunity to chat during a lunch hour. Please consider joining us. Call 262-833-8764 to register.

First THURSDAY 10:30 am-12Noon

Alzheimer's Association Group – **Sept. 6**

For Families Dealing with Alzheimer's and other Dementias
Lincoln Lutheran Office Building, 2000 Domanik Dr, 4th Floor

Second Tuesday 1:30-3:00 pm **Sept. 11**

Yorkville United Methodist Church
17645 Old Yorkville Rd (3 Miles West
of I-94, just North of Highway 20)

Second Saturday 10:30 am–12 Noon **Sept. 8**

Mount Pleasant Lutheran Church, 1700 S. Green Bay Road

Third Wednesday 1:30-3:00 PM **Sept. 19**

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

Third Thursday 6:00-7:30 PM

Sept. 20

Alzheimer's Association Group

For Families Dealing with Alzheimer's and other Dementias

Mount Pleasant Lutheran Church, 1700 S Green Bay Rd

Other Events For Caregiving Families

The following classes will be offered at the **Racine County Ives Grove Building,
14200 Washington Avenue, Sturtevant, WI 53177**

POWERFUL TOOLS FOR CAREGIVERS

A highly acclaimed class to help family caregivers advocate for their own well-being and thrive (not just survive) during their caregiving years.

**Mondays from Sept. 10 – Oct. 15, 1:15-3:15 PM
(See Accompanying Flyer)**

STEPPING ON

A Falls Prevention Workshop that is well-researched and proven effective.

**Mondays, Sept. 24 – Nov. 5 1:30-3:30 PM
(See accompanying flyer)**

*May you enjoy both summer and autumn delights this month-
Wishing you and yours a "fall-less autumn". (Happy Falls Prevention Month!)*

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