

ELDER CARE UPDATES



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Karen Witkowicz
Elder Care Manager
and Consultant
1099 Cane Patch
Webster NY 14580
(585) 671-9702
KarenECM@aol.com

Building Your Care Network

by Karen Witkowicz

As professionals in the field of aging, and often as caregivers of elderly relatives ourselves, one of our tasks is building a care team around the older person and her caregivers.

I like to think of this as a series of concentric circles with the family and elder person in the middle. The family needs support and encouragement to start thinking about who they know that could help them with caregiving tasks. Asking the family to write down the jobs they need help with is a good preparatory step. The first circle out from the middle is the rest of the extended family. Is there a sibling, aunt, uncle or grandchild who could run some errands occasionally or stay with the elder while the caregiver takes a break? Not all family members may be willing or able to help, but write down those who are or who will if asked. The next circle out is neighbors and close friends. Maybe there is a next-door neighbor who will stop by occasionally to check on the person if the caregiver needs to get out for awhile. Friends may be willing to visit, take the elder to lunch or out for a walk and be a supportive listener to the caregiver.

Next, you step into the circle of membership organizations. Look at any religious affiliations, prayer groups, fraternal organizations, hobby clubs, service organizations, or other



Karen Witkowicz, Elder Care Manager and Consultant

groups the care receiver or caregiver belongs to. List any people you know who may be helpful to add to the team. If specific needs, such as transportation arise, a call to the organization may bring volunteers willing to give their time to help.

The next circle of the network is that of community based home services. This includes such services as adult day services, agencies that serve people with particular diagnoses or illnesses, senior centers, elder care managers and in-home help. These services allow the elderly person to stay home longer as they provide help to the caregiver.

The last ring includes alternate living communities. These are adult homes, assisted living, enriched living and nursing homes. These options are available for when the person can no longer be safely cared for at home.

In sum, think of who can help do
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*"Excellent care for your loved one
. Peace of mind for you."*

Elder Care Updates

Prescription Medication Safety: When Vigilance Pays Off

Caregivers need to constantly monitor and reassess the health and well-being of their loved one. This can be a discouraging and draining responsibility, especially in times of marked decline. To be sure, though, that those declines are really the result of the natural aging process, and not the result of their medical care, caregivers need to be vigilant in tracking their loved one's prescription medication health.

Careful attention to your loved one's prescription medication safety can literally guard their health, sanity and life. 140,000 people die each year as a result of adverse drug interactions.

Two heads are better than one. Even if your elderly relative is alert and competent you should take an active role in administering his or her prescription medication. The sheer number of prescription medications that many elderly people must take opens the door to possible allergic reactions, adverse reactions, overdoses and crossover reactions. A second observer can be vital! Remember the following important points:

- Á DOCTOR COMMUNICATION – Check and recheck to make sure your loved one's doctor knows what medications have been prescribed by other doctors. Keep you doctor informed of changes in prescriptions or in lifestyle.
- Á NEW DRUGS – The introduction of a new medication is, of course, a time when your loved one must be carefully observed for reactions and changes.
- Á WRITE IT DOWN – That passing thought, "Isn't she more confused after taking her...?" may occur many times before it registers with you as something to pass on to the doctor. Keep a record of drugs taken and your loved one's reaction, especially after the introduction of a new medication. Find a printable page to help you begin a simple "medication journal" at www.rochestereldercare.com/medlog.pdf
- Á NOT IN THE DARK – Always administer medications with the lights on and with the caregiver alert.
- Á ORIGINAL CONTAINERS – Keep all medications in their original containers. This will minimize confusion and will help caregivers monitor expiration dates and remaining doses. „

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what tasks. Sometimes just knowing that help is out there gives caregivers some peace of mind.

- Writing down who can do what is important.
- Ask for their help.
- Build your network step-by-step over time.
- Assess it occasionally to see where the gaps are and who needs to be plugged-in.

If you have questions about building a care network or about what services are available to you in the community, please do not hesitate to call me at (585) 671-9702. „

Resources For Caregivers

Websites:

www.elderlawanswers.com –

This site's purpose is to help you find an elder lawyer. Lots of information is also available about changes in the law that affect elders and their families. Long-term care insurance, long-term and estate planning, health care proxy, living wills are also explained.

A great tool for checking possible drug interactions can be found online at <http://health.discovery.com/> Click "Drug Reference Center" and then "Drug Checker" in the menu on the left. Then select your drugs (Prescription and over-the-counter) from the exhaustive alphabetical lists provided.

Books:

"Beyond Grief: A Guide for Recovering From the Death of a Loved One" by Carol Staudacher

This is a complete guide for anyone surviving the death of a loved one. It is written for both the bereaved and for the health care professional. Grievors will find supportive personal narratives along with a step-by-step approach to recovery. This book offers reassurance and hope to grieving persons. 1 „