

The Family Caregiver Newsletter

New Office Location!

Christine M. Valentin has recently joined the staff of Inner Ventures – a Holistic center located in Summit, New Jersey that specializes in enhancing an individual's well-being through complimentary services like acupuncture, positive psychology, massage therapy, meditation, etc.

As a licensed clinical social worker, Ms. Valentin will provide mental health services to individuals and families at the Summit location. She will also host educational workshops that focus on common geriatric illnesses like Alzheimer's disease as well as issues like elder abuse and hoarding.

Ms. Valentin also provides sessions via telephone for individuals who are unable to come to the Summit office. She is licensed in New Jersey and New York, is currently accepting new clients, and has appointment hours during the evenings and weekends. She also speaks Spanish.

To schedule an appointment at the Summit office or for more information about Inner Ventures visit www.inner-ventures.com



*One person caring about another represents life's greatest value.
~Jim Rohn*

Caring for another individual whether a parent, spouse or significant other can be challenging and stressful. While there are many ways to reduce caregiver-related stress, one effective way is to become familiar with your loved one's illness along with how it can impact his/her emotional, physical and psychological well-being. This particular issue will discuss kidney disease and provide information to caregivers about organizations that offer assistance. Tips for enhancing a caregiver's well-being are also discussed.

In this issue:

Caregiver Question:	Caregiver Resource:	Caregiver Tips:
Help me understand... A sister inquires about caring for her brother with kidney disease.	Learn about agencies and organizations that educate and support caregivers.	Suggestions for enhancing the day-to-day care of someone with kidney disease.



Help Me Understand...

My brother is receiving dialysis for his kidneys and I've noticed a change in his mood and attitude. He also doesn't seem to be able to pay attention to certain things. Can you please help me understand what I'm noticing?

Kidney disease, as you may already know, is a non-curable medical condition that often requires dialysis treatment. Individuals who are diagnosed with kidney disease can experience various physical, emotional and psychological stressors; stressors that can cause a person to become moody, frustrated, short-tempered, etc.

If you haven't done so already, I would encourage you to have your brother discuss his symptoms with his physician to rule out any other medical causes. A review of his medications can also help to address potential side effects. In the meantime, you may find it helpful to become as familiar as possible with the physical, emotional and psychological impact kidney disease can have on a person, which I have briefly summarized below.

Physically, kidney disease can cause a variety of symptoms, including but not limited to feeling tired, weak and/or cold. In addition to such symptoms, dialysis treatment can also cause a person to feel exhausted and drained due to the process and time commitment required – about three times a week, four to six hours a day.

Emotionally, kidney disease can cause a person to experience feelings of fear, loss and anger. Fear regarding uncertainty about what the future holds, loss due to the inability of the body to perform as it once did, and anger because of the need to depend on others, including a machine.

Psychologically, having kidney disease is a life changing illness that takes time to adjust to. Each person will cope in his/her own way and can take longer than others to adjust. Between the physical changes and the time commitment, it is not unheard of for individuals to even become depressed; a condition for which professional attention should definitely be obtained.

Overall, patience and understanding can be extremely beneficial when trying to understand the changes you are noticing in your brother. He, for the most part, will be the best person to explain his mood so you may want to ask him directly if you feel comfortable. If you find he is unresponsive and having a hard time coping with his diagnosis consider discussing his interest in a support group and providing him with a list of local groups for him to review. This approach might help, especially if your brother doesn't want to burden you with his thoughts and concerns. Your brother may find comfort and inspiration in learning he is not alone and that others are successfully living with the same disease.

Kidney Disease Resources



Education

As previously mentioned, educating yourself about the various aspects of kidney disease can go a long way in reducing stress. Besides learning about the disease, it is also important to become familiar with the complications associated with treatment, including behavioral symptoms. You can start the learning process by speaking to health care professionals involved in your loved one's care. You can also visit websites like The National Kidney Foundation (www.kidney.org) to obtain detailed information about kidney disease and treatment options.



Financial

Costs associated with kidney disease like transportation to dialysis centers, food for special diets and medical equipment can create a financial strain for an individual and his/her family. This is especially true if the person with kidney disease is the primary breadwinner and no longer capable of working full-time. Organizations like the American Kidney Fund provide financial grants to pay for costs associated with insurance premiums, transportation, medications, etc. More information can be obtained by visiting www.kidneyfund.org.



Caregiver Support

The healing power of support, whether it comes from close relatives, a trusted friend or a group of "strangers" should never be underestimated. Support groups occur in different formats like phone or via computer and as a result it may be easy to find a convenient format for you. Try speaking to the social worker involved in your loved one's care to learn about support groups for caregivers and individuals with kidney disease. You can also visit the American Association of Kidney Patients (www.aakp.org/outreach) for a list of nationwide support groups.

Caregiver Tips

Be Organized

Dialysis treatment requires patience, a significant commitment of time, and understanding. Keeping track of all appointments, including family activities, on one designated calendar can help reduce the stress that often comes with “double booking” or missing appointments because of a miscommunication. Whether maintained online or kept on the refrigerator door, the calendar could help to reduce frustration.



Communicate and Maintain Independence

Communicating with your loved one and remembering the importance of independence can also help reduce stress. Although it is not the intention of many family caregivers to take away their loved one’s independence, the truth of the matter is it often inadvertently happens. Managing a significant amount of tasks without any input from your loved one can cause him/her to feel useless and unimportant. It is important for your loved one to still perform tasks he/she is capable of physically managing as it can build self-esteem. Communication is also crucial to understanding what your loved one is experiencing, feeling and frustrated with. Knowing such factors can also help you find ways to reduce their stress while ultimately reducing yours.



Divide the Tasks

Many new responsibilities come with this chronic disease. After reviewing what you and your loved one are physically capable of handling, consider asking friends, relatives or neighbors to assist. Tasks like shopping for special food, picking up the kids from school, or giving your loved one a ride to the dialysis center are just a few examples of the “things to do” that can be removed from your long list.

Thank you for reading this issue of The Family Caregiver Newsletter.



**Do you have a caregiver-related question you would like to ask?
Please feel free to e-mail your question to christine.m.valentin@gmail.com**

**To stay up-to-date on the latest caregiver-related news
be sure to visit me on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or sign up for my [blog](#).**

For practical advice or counseling, contact Christine at (347) 565-4179.

About the Editor:

Christine M. Valentin is a licensed clinical social worker in the states of New York and New Jersey. Ms. Valentin has worked with older adults for six years and started her private practice in January 2010. Through education and support, Ms. Valentin assists family caregivers balance everyday responsibilities with their caregiving role. She offers evening and weekend appointments and speaks Spanish. If you would like more information about the services she provides, please visit www.familycaregiversocialworker.com