

S U M M E R 2 0 1 1

The Family Caregiver Newsletter



Announcing The Family Caregiver Blog!

Do you want to know how you can take care of yourself and why you should be talking about your needs?

The Family Caregiver Blog can help. Monthly posts will address many of the issues family caregivers experience throughout the caregiving journey.

To read and comment, visit www.thefamilycaregiverblog.com

Want to share your personal experience?
Feel free to email me at Christine.m.valentin@gmail.com

Throughout my work with family caregivers, many express concern regarding medications their loved one is taking. Besides wanting to ensure they have been prescribed the right kind, many also worry that their relative may not be taking their medications correctly or are taking too much. This issue will focus on how to address this problem along with products that may assist. Also discussed are warning signs to be aware of during your next visit.

*Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood.
Now is the time to understand more,
so that we may fear less.
~ Marie Curie*

In This Issue:

Caregiver Question:

What can I do? –
Suggestions on
addressing medication
mismanagement.

Pg. 2

Caregiver Resource:

Learn about available
medication
management products
and services.

Pg. 3

Caregiver Tip:

How to recognize
signs of medication
mismanagement.

Pg. 5

What Can I Do?

My father lives alone and I don't believe he is taking his medications correctly.

Is there anything I can do?

There are definitely a few things you can do to try to rectify this problem. First, begin by learning all of the prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, herbal supplements and vitamins your father is currently taking. Knowing this information, as well as why he is taking them and for how long of a period, can give you a better sense of what your dad's daily medication routine looks like along with his understanding of his illness. As you are becoming familiar with his medications, you should create a list which includes name of drug and dosage information. This list can then be reviewed with his primary care physician to ensure accuracy and potentially remove any drugs which are no longer needed or have a potential of harmful interaction.

After doing so, setting the stage for correct medication administration is important. In other words, having the right medication means nothing if he is not taking them properly. To start, assess whether your father is having any difficulty opening his prescription bottles or reading the small print on the labels. Such problems can cause an individual to take the wrong dosage or miss a dose because of inability to open the container. If your father is having such trouble, consider asking his pharmacy for easy-to-open bottle caps and/or large print labels.

You may also wish to organize your father's medications to reduce the amount of confusion often accompanied with multiple medications. This can be done by using a pill box, having his medications placed in different colored prescription bottles, or prearranged in "bubble" packs. Check with your dad's pharmacy to inquire about these last two options as they are not yet offered by all. In addition to organizing his medications, you may also want to create a medication chart. A medication chart can make it easier for your dad to remember what pill he has to take, how he should take it, and at what time. See the illustration below for an example of what a medication chart can look like.

In the event your father is forgetting to take his medications, then an effective solution may be to set a clock alarm or call him whenever it is time for him to take his medications. Such options are feasible if your father is not taking multiple medications throughout a 24-hour period and you have the time to do so. Otherwise, a medication dispenser or reminder may be best.

Lastly, if your father is having short-term memory issues, solely relying on the products described above, without some type of in-home assistance, will not be effective. In-home assistance can include having a neighbor or relative help out, purchasing a medication monitoring system, or hiring a medication management service. While these options can be difficult to arrange or costly, they can be helpful and can go a long way in reducing the amount of stress you may be experiencing surrounding this issue.

Medication Chart Sample

| Time of Medication | Medication 1 (purpose i.e. pill for cholesterol) | Medication 2 (purpose) | Medication 3 (purpose) | Medication 4 (purpose) |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 7 a.m. | Take with Water | - | - | - |
| 11 a.m. | - | Take with Food | Take with Food | - |
| 3 p.m. | - | - | - | Take with Food May make drowsy |
| 7 p.m. | Take with Water | - | - | Take with Water |

Medication Management Options

As older adults age, the amount of medications they are prescribed generally increases. As a result, medication management becomes necessary in order to ensure proper adherence and prevent harmful situations from arising. Nowadays, there are numerous products and services available to help with organization and relieve confusion and stress. Below is a brief summary of the options previously mentioned.



Pill boxes are organizational containers that allow individuals to sort their daily medication. These boxes are best for any individual who would like to have easy access to their medication without carrying around many pill bottles or for individuals who would like to minimize confusion. Pill boxes can be found at any local pharmacy and are inexpensive. Older adults may even be able to get them for free at local healthcare community events.



Blister Packs or “bubble” packs are prepackaged clear plastic packages that contain medications which are arranged by day and time of dosage along with the persons’ identifying information. These packs are ideal for any individual who has difficulty sorting their medication and does not have assistance. Although not yet offered by every pharmacy, they are becoming more popular. Cost can vary, along with how many days’ supply an individual can receive. Check with your pharmacy to inquire about availability.

Medication Management cont...



Medication reminders come with a variety of options. The most common types come with an alarm. These types are ideal for individuals who need prompting to take their medications. They can be found at a medical supply store or your local pharmacy. The less common type is a dispenser that comes with a monitoring service which can alert the primary caregiver when a dosage has not been taken. This type of service can be effective for individuals with short-term memory loss and no in-home assistance. At present time, the only monitoring service I'm aware of is offered through Philips. For more information, visit <http://www.managemypills.com>. Overall, both types are beneficial and depending on one's particular situation can reduce the worry often associated with this issue.



Medication management services can consist of an aide or nurse visiting a client's home and assisting with taking or pre-pouring medications. This type of service is ideal for individuals who have moderate to severe memory impairment and do not have family or friends who are available to assist. Such a service can be obtained through a state-funded agency for little or no cost, through your health care coverage, or through a geriatric care management agency for a fee. For more information, contact your insurance carrier to inquire about coverage options or your local Area Agency on Aging to find out about services available in your community. Visit www.eldercare.gov to find an agency near you.

Signs of Medication Mismanagement

Asking your loved one whether he/she is having trouble managing their medications may not generate an honest response, especially if your loved one is stubborn. There are, however, signs you can keep an eye out for during your next visit that can give you an idea of how they are managing.

Numerous Pill Bottles of the Same Medication

Older adults, who might have many things on their mind, may not keep track of how much medication they have around the house. This can especially occur if a person receives their medication via mail-order whereby a 90-day supply is usually provided. If you notice multiple bottles or packages of the same medication, first verify that not all are open at the same time and then try to establish a storage place for them whereby your loved one can easily seek them out when his/her current supply runs out.

Medications Placed Throughout the Home

If you notice that your loved one has his/her medications in the kitchen, bathroom, dining room, living room, bedroom, etc...then something is not right. While it is possible for them to maybe have their nighttime medication by their bedside and their “take with food medication” in the kitchen, what you don’t want to see is medication that appears to be placed anywhere. In other words, medication should be somewhat organized and kept together to reduce risk of confusion, especially if the packaging looks alike.

Running Out of Medication Before Refill Date

One clear cut sign that something is not right is if your loved one needs a refill sooner than the refill dates. Chances are he/she may be taking too many. Whether it is because he/she is confused about when to take the pills or forgetting they took a dose, either way some form of assistance is needed in order to prevent a dangerous situation from occurring.

Expired Medications

Expired medications can be a sign that your loved one is not double checking what he/she is taking. While some medications may simply lose their potency, others can cause harm. It is important to explain the necessity of getting rid of expired medications and to verify they are doing so by checking a few times a year.

Overall, medication adherence should be taken seriously and not overlooked for fear of offending someone. A simple offer to pick up refills from the drugstore or to review what type of medications they have because of “a recall you heard about” might give you the opportunity to review his/her medications and ensure their safety.



While this issue offers some strategic advice and coping skills, there are plenty more that can be beneficial. To receive future Family Caregiver newsletters please visit www.familycaregiversocialworker.com and fill out the corresponding section.

For practical advice or counseling, contact
Christine M. Valentin at 347-512-2251.

APPOINTMENTS NOW AVAILABLE!!

Visit me on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)

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 their 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