



Keeping In Touch

Winter 2001

News For Family Caregivers

Advice on Eldercare Legal and Financial Issues

If you need some information to help you understand and handle financial and legal issues that affect aging seniors, attend this free program.

Thursday, February 15

7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Grace Lutheran Church,
County Road 42 and Pennock Ave.,
Apple Valley

Understanding Memory Loss

If you are caring for an older person with memory loss or confusion, this free program will help you understand the disease process that causes memory loss.

Thursday, February 22

7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Grace Lutheran Church,
County Road 42 and Pennock Ave.,
Apple Valley

Dealing with Depression

If you want some specifics about how depression affects older people and how you can help yourself or others who are depressed, this free program is for you.

Monday, March 26

2:00 PM – 4:00 PM

O'Leary Manor,
1220 Town Centre Drive, Eagan

DARTS is sponsoring these programs. For more information and to register, call 651-455-1560.

Using Metaphor to Tell Caregiving Tales

Many caregivers struggle with answering the question, "How are you?" "Ok" is a common answer, but it doesn't get to the heart of what a caregiver is experiencing. A better, more complete answer might go like this

"How are you?"

"I feel like I'm drowning beneath the Pacific Ocean."

As you can see, both responses answer the question, but the second example uses a metaphor to provide clearer insight into your caregiving experiences. Metaphors help the listener better understand and appreciate your life. Here's an example of how a caregiver group used metaphor; it's from the book *I'm With You Now*, written by M. Catherine Ray.

"I remember one family from our support group who was very musical – every one of them played an instrument. They were talking one night about their horrible arguments, and another group member said, 'You folks are just like an orchestra. Sometimes one of you gets a little out of tune, that's all.' The idea seemed to stick somehow. Every week they'd walk in the room and someone would say, 'Oh, good, the orchestra has arrived!' Pretty soon they started to talk that way themselves. Instead of sounding so angry, the wife started saying, 'Bob is sure playing from a different score sheet!' Everyone laughed and the whole idea seemed like a joke, but deep down it really bonded them, too. And they found a way of talking about their problems that didn't attack each other."

Here are two other metaphor examples from her book that can be used by caregivers:

The River

The family finds itself suddenly adrift in the river of incurable illness. Loved ones and friends watch from the riverbanks. The medical team reels in the family, giving guidance and provisions when they're able. There are stagnant times, times of spinning eddies. There are gently gliding times, enjoying the scenery, and terrifying times of relapse and rapids. Beneath it all is the knowledge that they could capsize; they have little control over the current. This experience is a journey, sometimes frightening, sometimes peaceful, sometimes exhilarating. It needs many people to take up an oar. It also needs people to sit back and appreciate the journey even when they can't entirely control the river.

(Turn over – article continues on back)

Using Metaphor to Tell Caregiving Tales (continued)

Quilting

Few metaphors are more American than the quilting bee, where friends and neighbors gather to stitch and socialize, threading their lives together while they work. Such is the circle of loved ones, surrounding a family with illness. Friends arrive on the doorstep with only scraps for resources, but through collaboration, they produce function and, frequently, unusual artistry. Some quilts are carefully planned and measured, just like some illnesses. Others are called Crazy Quilts, the shapes spilling out on top of each other, just like some illnesses that randomly toss down their symptoms and consequences. Some quilters are more experienced – those friends who help the family with tactful efficiency. Other quilters make uneven or insecure stitches – the friends who stumble through an awkward conversation – but their parts of the finished product are no less precious.

If either of these metaphor examples feels right for you, go ahead and start using it to describe your caregiving. Or make up your own to best describe your life. Good luck and happy metaphoring!

may we help you?

Where does a caregiver turn when they need some help caring for their loved one, but can't afford to hire help? One option is to turn to the Alternative Care Program. It is aimed at seniors who want to stay in their homes and who meet certain income and asset levels. The asset guidelines are fairly liberal: for a single person, less than \$25,000; for a couple, less than \$49,000 (not including the home).

This program, administered by Dakota County, can pay for a variety of services for persons over

65 years who need some help to live at home. Some services and products include respite care, adult day care, home health care, Meals on Wheels, nursing visits, medical supplies, incontinence products, and homemaking/chore services. The eligible person may be asked to pay a portion of the costs, depending on financial situation.

For more information about the Alternative Care Program, call Dakota County Public Health Nursing at 651-552-3115.

Coming in February:

Check out the DARTS-sponsored web site for caregivers at www.caregiverMN.org to see helpful and practical information on areas that affect caregivers and those who receive their care.

Infirmities

From Green Winter Celebrations of Old Age
By Elise Maclay

In line, in the supermarket,
I stood next to a young woman with a baby.
The baby drooled.
His mother smiled and wiped his mouth with a tissue.
The baby seized the tissue and threw it to the floor.
His mother picked it up, laughing.
He grabbed it again and threw it under our feet.
Again and again.
His mother laughed.
The baby squirmed, disarranged his clothes.
Grew red in the face.
Babbled gibberish.
His mother cuddled him and smiled.
So understanding, so kind,
To an old father, trembling, murmuring,
Wandering in his mind?
Am I? To my friends who falter and fail
Why do the infirmities of age revolt us?
They seem unnatural.
We're wrong: all living things move
Gently toward decay.
Is a blasted oak revolting?
Are we afraid? Yes. I draw inwardly away
From my failing friends because I see
Myself in them. I don't drool.
But tomorrow I may. My hands shake
And I don't always catch what people say.
Help us to be as gentle with old people
As we are with infants.
Help us to look past the tic, the tremor,
The gray failed flesh the way we look
Past the baby's helplessness to see
A unique self
Reflecting Your Divinity.

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