



In this issue

Getting seniors to take medication...1-4
Hospital Sitters.....1-3
Home Care Assistance News.....1
Caregiver Spotlight.....3
Senior News and Alerts.....4

Hospital Sitters: critical care for older patients

One of the most critical places to have a caregiver with you is during a hospital stay. Many people find this a surprising concept. You would think that having nurses, doctors and medical staff so close by would make hospitals one of the safest places to be. Sadly, this isn't the case. With one or two busy nurses, working 12-hour shifts and handling many

Home Care Assistance News

Bravo Health enlists Home Care Assistance to provide transportation, companionship and other services for approximately 1,400 Medicare beneficiaries.

Home Care Assistance of Eastern Pennsylvania has begun providing transportation and other services under contract with Bravo Health, a leading, nationally-recognized provider of services to Medicare beneficiaries.

These services include transportation to and from appointments at medical facilities, assistance in scheduling appointments, companionship and other aid for approximately 1,400 members of Bravo Health.

Getting seniors to take their medicine—safely

Two-thirds of all seniors take at least one medication each day, and 25 percent take three or more. Many seniors owe their lives—or at least their quality of life—to medications. Of course, medicine doesn't work if patients don't take it.

Researchers have found that getting older adults to take their medicine is a difficult task—even in those with life-threatening conditions. A new study shows it is almost hopeless to get seniors to take the medicines their doctors prescribe, let alone to follow directions for long periods.



Careful monitoring of medications by a caregiver or family member may be the only way to ensure seniors maintain the necessary long-term regimen.

“Simple things don't work and nothing works very well,” said lead researcher Dr. R. Brian Haynes of the McMaster University Faculty of Health Sciences in Hamilton, Ontario.

A previous study estimated that seniors only take half of the doses of the prescription medications they administer themselves. “Few people take all of their medications and many do not bother to take any,” Haynes said.

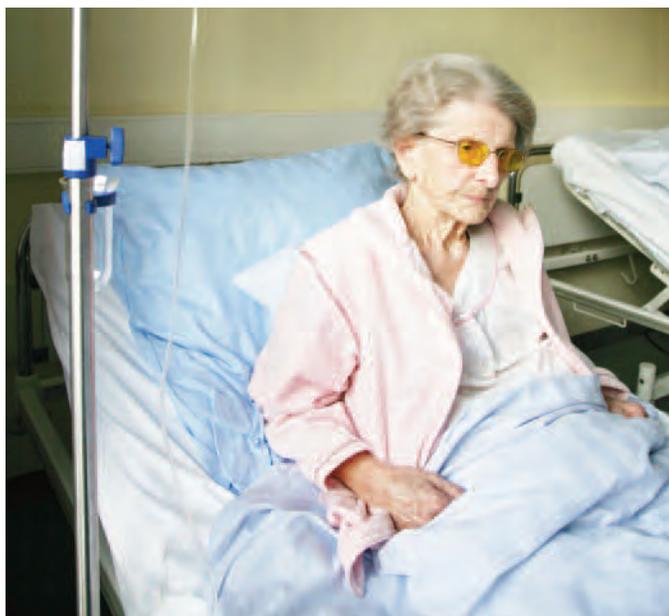
(Continued next page...)

Hospital sitters (continued):

patients with critical needs, it can be a long wait between the time you push a call button until anyone comes to check on you. Plus, it only takes an instant for a dangerous fall to occur. Ten percent of fatal falls for older adults occur in hospitals. Dementia, disorientation and medication are the leading factors that contribute to falls in hospitals.

Hospital sitters are the solution

The best safety precaution is a specialized caregiver known as a hospital sitter. Hospital sitters provide round-the-clock companionship and make observations of any problems the patient may be having. Sitters monitor and keep the patient



Hospitals aren't just a lonely place for seniors— they can also be a dangerous place to be left alone.

company, converse and read or even run errands for the patient. However, sitters cannot aid or participate in any patient care or physical contact and must stay out of the way of hospital staff.

When sitters are used, they are under the direction of the patient registered nurse. In the event of an urgent patient need, a fall or a medical emergency, the sitter will be there to immediately summon the nurse in charge.

(Continued next page...)

Getting seniors to take their meds (continued):

Failure to take prescribed medication is linked to higher death rates.

Why do so many seniors skip their meds?

There are many potential reasons why seniors might not bother (or be able) to take their medications. These include dementia, mental illnesses, depression or confusion. Plus, many conditions, such as diabetes, have very complex monitoring and drug regimens.

Some seniors are obstinate against taking medicines, believing they are unnecessary. This can be especially true for medications that affect conditions that are relatively asymptomatic, like hypertension or hypothyroidism. Worse yet are drugs that are essential but come with unpleasant side effects.

Finally, some seniors may adopt a state of mind in which they believe that treating their illness is futile. They abandon hope that they will recover, and thus view taking medications as pointless.

What is the remedy?

Researchers have found that some approaches are successful in helping seniors take their medications for the short term. These include counseling and providing written instructions and pill packaging that helps patients take their drugs properly—like the day-by-day dose packaging and calendar-based pill boxes.

Getting seniors to take their drugs over long periods is much more challenging. Using daily reminders, psychological therapy and manual telephone follow-up help. However, even the most effective strategies often do not lead to major improvements in adherence or the health of seniors.

(Continued on page 4...)

Hospital sitters (continued):

Hospital administrators are so concerned by common safety risks, they even hire hospital sitters themselves to watch over their high-profile patients, especially those who have made major donations to the hospital. A physician may prescribe a continuous, one-to-one sitter for patients who have an impaired ability to understand or follow directions or who are unable to realize the potential that they could harm themselves as a consequence of their actions.

Sitters warm hearts, not just seats

While safety is critically important, hospital sitters do more than help prevent falls and alert nurses to medical emergencies. “Raw companionship is great medicine,” says Dr. Mynra Lee, a physician at Mt. Zion Medical Center. “Despite so many busy people running around, hospitals are lonely places.”

Knowing another person is in the room watching over them—especially if it’s someone familiar like a regular caregiver, make patients feel more secure and makes a hospital room more human.

An extra set of eyes and ears

One of the most helpful tasks that sitters can do is to keep a journal. Sitters can record every doctor visit/outcome that occurs during their shift, describe any procedures done and the expected and actual outcomes, observations of the patient.

Sitters can also maintain emergency contact information for the patient’s family, as well as essential legal documents—including a copy of the patient’s Advanced Directives, in case a relative is unable to be contacted for a critical decision.

Hospital sitters provide peace of mind for the patient’s family. They supply vigilance that ensures safety and companionship that reduces a patient’s boredom and depression. They also enable the patient’s family to go home and rest, knowing their loved one will never be alone.

Caregiver Spotlight

Kathy Salyers, a caregiver from the Birmingham, Alabama HCA office, has twenty-five years of experience in caring for others. She has earned her CNA certificate and is also certified in Alzheimer’s training that taught her how to deal and cope with these types of clients. “It’s all in your approach” Kathy states.



*Caregiver of the Month:
Kathy Salyers and client.*

She was an activities director for an Alzheimer’s and Dementia unit at an assisted living facility for years. There she learned how to interact with the elderly and worked to keep them stimulated. This has carried over into her current job with HCA.

Kathy joined our client’s home at a crucial time. The wife of her client had fallen ill and had an extensive stay in the hospital. Kathy took great care of the client during this time. She has provided the family with a peace of mind and comfort that they needed at this time and continues to do this today.

She openly communicates with the family and the client’s entire health team about her client’s current health problems. The family confidently says, “Kathy has been great; she is like a part of the family. We are very grateful for her and ‘Pops’ could not have made it through this difficult time without her.”

Kathy is very professional, genuine in her work and her caregiving. We are pleased for Kathy to be a part of our staff and team.

Senior care news

Sleeping Less than 7.5 Hours Daily May Cause Heart Disease for Elderly with Hypertension

Sleeping less than seven and a half hours per day may be associated with future risk of heart disease for older people, particularly when it occurs with elevated nighttime blood pressure, according to a report in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*. Seniors' sleep patterns should be checked, especially for those with high blood pressure.

A combination of little sleep and overnight elevated blood pressure appears to be associated with an increased risk of disease.

Getting adequate sleep is essential to preventing health conditions such as obesity and diabetes as well as several risk factors for cardiovascular disease including sleep-disordered breathing and night-time hypertension (high blood pressure).

Taking Plavix with Popular GI Medications Increases Risk for Stroke, Heart Attack by 50%

Medco Health issues warning about second most popular drug in the world and its reaction to proton pump inhibitors

A report issued November 11, 2008 warns that taking the drug clopidogrel (brand name: Plavix), the second most popular drug in the world, with proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) can increase the risk for major cardiovascular problems by 50 percent and of having a heart attack by 74 percent. Medco Health Solutions, Inc. presented the study at the 2008 Scientific Sessions of the American Heart Association.

Getting seniors to take their meds (continued):

Research into improving long-term success has been inconclusive. Debra Roter, a professor at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, warns that strategies used in research studies are simplistic and inflexible. "Studies don't match messiness of what patients do in everyday life."

The caregiver connection

Since up to half of seniors are unable or unwilling to follow a prescribed medication regimen, the only sure solution is continual monitoring of medications by a caregiver. That caregiver can be a private caregiver, a family caregiver or a caregiver at a facility.

Unlike family members, though, professional caregivers are often more effective at medication reminders and monitoring, since seniors tend to view them as more authoritative than relatives, especially their own children. Plus, tasked with this duty, caregivers are more reliable at following through, since they keep daily records and are less susceptible to distractions or complacency that family members may suffer.

Monitoring is critical

The attention caregivers can bring to monitoring medications can also save lives by helping to avoid accidental dangerous interactions between multiple medications.

Drug interactions are a serious concern for seniors. According to the Council on Family Health, almost 40 percent of all drug reactions reported each year involve people over 60.

Caregivers can also be excellent at noticing and reporting any side effects a senior may be experiencing—including dizziness, constipation, nausea, sleep changes, diarrhea, incontinence, mood changes, or a rash—after he or she takes a drug.