

Notes From A G.P

Trust

Who do you trust to make the right medical /financial decisions if you were to develop dementia as you get older? Thankfully, not a decision many of us will have to make for ourselves but one worth pondering while our mental faculties are intact. This issue recently arose within my own practice when a man in his early 60's developed early onset dementia.

Although dementia affects almost 44,000 people and touches the lives of 50,000 carers and hundreds of thousands of family members, it is comparatively rare, that dementia can affect younger people. There are approximately 4,000 people under the age of 65 with Younger Onset Dementia in the Ireland.

Dementia usually has an insidious onset, with most people developing symptoms gradually over a period of years. The progression of this disease is largely unpredictable for each individual. My patient had been referred to a neurologist and then sent on to an expert in medicine of the elderly in St. James's Hospital. There, they have a multidisciplinary team who look at all the implication of dementia on an individual and on their family. The social workers explained to the

patient and his family that they would have to make some decisions soon, regarding the patient's future welfare before dementia affected his mental competence. The legal term is Enduring Power of Attorney. This is a legal arrangement whereby one person (the donor) gives authority to another (the attorney) or others, to act on their behalf in the event of the donor becoming unable to manage their own affairs.

Some might say this is an easy decision, just let the spouse decide what's best ,others might say the children who are younger should make the important decisions. Imagine these scenarios; the husband who suffers from dementia has recently remarried in the previous 3 years, after the death of his first wife, to a woman 20 years his junior. The children of his first marriage don't like his new wife and certainly don't want her to be in charge of all his financial affairs for fear of being written out their father's will. Or another scenario where the wife of a dementia sufferer feels a sense of duty to nurse



her husband at home, even though it is causing her undue harm to her own mental and physical wellbeing, never mind her not being able to manage the situation. There are many scenarios which can complicate a simple issue. What serves the best interest of the patient and who is the person who serves that interest?

Do you know?

PEARLS OF WISDOM

The longer I live the more beautiful life becomes.
Frank Lloyd Wright (1869 - 1959)

Aging is not 'lost youth' but a new stage of opportunity and strength.
Betty Friedan (1921 - 2006)

It's no longer a question of staying healthy. It's a question of finding a sickness you like.
Jackie Mason (1934 -)

Testimonials

"My parents are very happy with how things are working out, they are getting out and about more and I can have quality time with them now". **Julie - Booterstown**

"My Mother is very pleased, both with the service being provided at present by Home Care Plus, and by the two carers who are providing that service, with both of whom she's developed a very relaxed & trusting relationship". **Daibhi - Blackrock**

"The cinema trip, what a great idea. Thanks for your kind approach."
Brian - Donnybrook

"The caliber of your carers is way ahead of anything else we have experienced"
Ronan - Rathfarnham

"I am amazed by how nice all of your carers are. Each one is nicer than the next!!"
Pharmacist - Mount Merrion



HOME CARE PLUS
trusted care at home

SPRING 2011 NEWSLETTER

Spring has arrived and not a moment to soon. While the heavy snows over the Christmas period were beautiful initially, their inconvenience soon came to the fore. I'd like to take this chance to thank all of our carers for the tremendous efforts they made to get to their clients on time during this period.

The past while has also been a turbulent time politically and economically so maybe the advent of spring will bring a bit of hope to all our lives.

This quarter's newsletter is packed with articles on our recent client day out to see the Kings Speech, useful information on senior health matters and comments on the recent Primetime Investigates programme. Dr. Michael O'Brien also gives us his insight into an important legal issue for sufferers of dementia.

For your information we have also being running our first radio add campaign on Q102. It has been very successful raising the awareness of Home Care Plus and our services in the Dublin area.

As usual if you have any comments or suggestions please feel free to contact me at our offices.

Michael Harty
Director



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Day Out at The Cinema

Home Care Plus recently invited our clients, their carers and any family members who wanted to attend, to a screening of The Kings Speech in the IMC cinema in Dun Laoghaire. Some of our clients were able to remember the actual Kings speech all those years ago!

For some of our clients it was their first time at the cinema in several years.

Tea and coffee were provided afterwards giving everyone a chance to mix and reminisce. A great day out was had by all.

Getting out and about and having some social interaction is important for senior citizens and at Home Care Plus we will continue organising more of these types of events going forward.



PrimeTime Scandal

The recent Primetime Investigates programme on home care while shocking did not come as a surprise. The total absence of official standards and regulation in the sector is scandalous.

Unfortunately, it always seems that a scandal or tragedy is necessary before issues are tackled by government. What's wrong with being proactive and listening to what older people's advocates have been saying for the last few years.

One issue that was insinuated during this scandal is that the problem lies primarily with private providers of home care and that as such private providers should be limited in the amount of care they provide.

This is something that in Home Care Plus we completely refute. It has been the more reputable private providers who have been at the forefront of pushing for legislation to regulate the sector.

We think it is important also to debunk the idea that profit and private provision equals bad service. If this was the case, there should be no private enterprise in society and the state should provide all.

Private provision of home care can bring significant savings to the table without cutting corners. If there was a transparent and open system for the contraction of all home

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care, decisions could be made to ensure the best service at the best value.

The problem here is not private enterprise but lack of regulation and a lack of official standards!

Carer of the Quarter

Our carer of the quarter is Bonnie Ratsoma. Bonnie is from Botswana but has been living in Ireland since 2009. Bonnie has a diploma in business studies and also travel & tourism but her real vocation is caring. Bonnie doesn't know how to say no. She is always available for emergencies and last minute help. All of Bonnie's clients sing her praises, saying that she has a real talent for caring. Bonnie is extremely diligent, often going above and beyond the call of duty.

Outside of caring, Bonnie loves to read and has an interest in gardening.



Dehydration and Confusion in the Elderly

Seniors may be at an increased risk of dehydration than many healthy younger adults. Unfortunately, dehydration can cause confusion, yet confusion may be a contributing factor for dehydration. A variety of factors make these problems of inadequate water levels and confusion more likely in older adults.

Causes of Dehydration in the Elderly

Dehydration, inadequate water in the body, tends to occur more frequently in older populations for a variety of reasons.

- The elderly might not sense the feeling of thirst as quickly as someone younger.
- An older person's sense of thirst might not be as strong as a younger person.
- Some seniors have limited mobility and may not be able to access an adequate water supply without assistance from another person or from assistive drinking devices.
- Some older adults have problems swallowing liquids.
- Some older adults are confused or have dementia and may not be mentally capable of drinking water on his or her own.
- A senior may not drink as many fluids as younger age groups.
- Some seniors fear incontinent episodes and may avoid drinking
- Those who have conditions such as kidney failure may be on a fluid restricted diet.
- The percentage of water in an older person's body tends to be lower,

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particularly if they have increased body fat.

- Older adults may have more chronic conditions, such as diabetes or cancer, that can increase the risk for dehydration.
- Seniors typically have lowered immunity to acute illnesses such as food poisoning and may experience more severe complications in a shorter period of time.
- Some older adults may take medications, such as "fluid pills," that increase urinary output.

Signs and Symptoms of Dehydration in Older Adults

Dehydration may occur very quickly in elders, particularly those who are frail. Symptoms tend to start mild initially but will become more severe as the body's water needs increase without being met. Some symptoms to indicate that a senior may be dehydrated include:

- Thirst (This symptoms may be subdued, unable to determine or verbalize, or absent in elderly)
- Decreased sweat
- Skin becomes less elastic (decreased turgor)
- Dry or cracked lips
- Dry mouth and mucous membranes
- Sunken eyes
- Flushed look to the face
- Urine output is less, dark and concentrated, or absent
- Low blood pressure (hypotension)
- Fast, weak, and/or irregular pulse
- Headache and/or irritability
- Loss of balance and/or dizziness
- High sodium (salt) levels in the blood

Internal organs such as the liver, kidneys, and brain can be damaged with severe confusion. Confusion may be a strong indicator that dehydration has progressed to a severe level and can lead to coma.

Dehydration Can Lead to Confusion in Elders

Dehydration, a lack of adequate fluids in the body, is a common problem in aging populations due to a variety of risk factors. Fortunately, dehydration can often be prevented by drinking recommended amounts of fluids for a person's age, activity, and environmental conditions.

Early warning signs of dehydration might be missed or not noticed in an elderly person until he or she becomes confused. Many people assume that confusion is a normal change of aging. New or increased confusion in an older adult warrants an assessment by a healthcare professional. Many causes of sudden confusion are reversible with prompt and appropriate treatment.

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