



In Care of You

A NEWSLETTER FOR CAREGIVERS FROM GREENE COUNTY COUNCIL ON AGING

MAY 2024

EMERGENCY ROOM VISITS AND THE PERSON LIVING WITH DEMENTIA

Taking our loved ones living with dementia to unfamiliar places can be difficult. The emergency room can be one of those difficult places because it is very chaotic – it's fast paced, there are beeps from machines, voices coming out of the ceiling as intercom pages, strange people asking lots of questions, staff poking at the patient without specific advanced notice regarding what they are going to do, and staff getting frustrated when their questions aren't being answered in a prompt manner or when the person living with dementia cannot follow directions. All this leads to a potential overload for the person living with dementia and the caregiver as they try to navigate and model how staff needs to interact with their loved one.

Unfortunately, our medical system has not fully trained all medical staff to know how to interact with a person with dementia.

It is important for staff to be informed of the cognitive status and to slow down and suspend their agenda of efficiency and try to meet the person where they are. Medical staff need to approach the PLWD in a calm and reassuring manner. Speak in a slow pace and use simple phrases, while not putting forth too many ideas all at once. If the caregiver is present, the medical staff may also be able to look to the family caregiver for assistance. The medical staff

then needs to respect the caregiver by listening to them, by allowing them to stay with their loved one, and by acknowledging the caregiver's important role in making the interaction with the PLWD a successful one while at the hospital.

Making an ER visit go smoother starts with the primary care provider. The family doctor can help the caregiver make a plan for when the PLWD needs medical attention outside of regular doctor's office hours. A doctor might suggest going to a clinic instead of the ER as the clinic might be quieter and a more calming environment. The family doc can also encourage family members to bring a medication list, a list of abilities that the PLWD has or doesn't have, insurance cards, contact numbers and names of all medical professionals involved in the loved one's care, and have living





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Providing support for those who support others

Emergency room visits and the person living with dementia, *continued*

will and POA documents with them. Further, the doctor might help in arranging the PLWD to be seen by a visiting physician in the home rather than having them go out for medical appointments or they can refer a person living with advanced dementia into palliative care which also include more in-home options. This way the need to go to the ER is reduced.

Going to an emergency room is probably going to happen at some point and there are some things you can do to make it easier.

Bring an additional person with you. That way, one person can focus on the PLWD and the other can talk with medical staff.

Bring some food and water for yourself and your loved one.

Bring any medications that you or your loved one will need over the next 6 hours or more. Bring incontinence products if needed.

Bring your cell phone and charger. Paper and pen.

Be sure to tell each staff member that your loved one has dementia as the staff may not be communicating that information as widely as needed.

Stay calm, reassuring, and patient.

Be prepared for a long wait in the waiting area as well in the examination room.

Be aware that staff may not have experience with PLWD and you may need to educate or model for them how they need to interact with your loved one.

There is a possibility that your loved one will be admitted to the hospital if they are sick enough. Be sure to talk with the doctor to make sure a hospital stay is necessary or is it possible to follow up with the primary care physician the next day?

Information based on: *Dementia and the ER – A Toxic Combination* by Freddi Segal-Gidan, PA-C, PhD
managedhealthcareconnect.com/articles/dementia-and-er-toxic-combination

Changes to Newsletter & YS Group

This newsletter will be moving to a bi-monthly schedule instead of every month. The next newsletter will be the July-August edition.

The support group in Yellow Springs will only be meeting once per month, the first Monday of the month, beginning in June.

Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or comments.

Support Groups

- 1st Monday of the month at 6pm, First Presbyterian Church, 314 Xenia Ave, Yellow Springs
- 1st Wednesday of the month at 11:30 am, GCCOA Xenia office
- 2nd & 4th Tuesdays at 9:30 am, Peace Lutheran Church, 3530 Dayton-Xenia Rd, Beavercreek

Weekly Radio Segment: Partners in Caregiving every Thursday soon after 6pm, WBZI—FM 100.3 AM 1500