

Checking In, Checking Up

How a Home Visit Can Reveal the Care Mom Really Needs

By Paula S. McCarron



Paula McCarron has more than 20 years of experience in healthcare including nursing homes and hospice. She lives in Chelmsford, Massachusetts, and can be reached at paulamccarron@gmail.com.

No matter how many phone calls you make to check on the well-being of an aging parent, it's more often the eye-opening home visit that forces the realization that your loved one may not be doing quite as well as you had imagined or hoped.

Jane Hart, executive director for Hart-Felt Ministries, a faith-based volunteer organization in Jacksonville, Florida, which provides home-based assistance for frail elders, says, "I can't recall ever getting a phone call from a family caregiver who asks for our help based on their recent phone calls to an aging loved one, but calls do come from family caregivers who have just been inside their loved one's home and realize something needs to be done to keep the situation from becoming a crisis."

For many caregivers, this realization comes from holiday visits, in long-distance caregiving situations, and on the daily or weekly visits when Mom or Dad live locally.

On any such visit, caregivers often find many of the same things Hart sees during her assessment visits. Piles of clutter, empty refrigerators, pet droppings, spoiled food, soiled clothing, mounting trash, and stacks of unopened mail are just some of the indicators that an aging loved one can no longer care for themselves or is no longer capable of handling household tasks. But even when Hart sees an alarming home environment, she knows it's best to proceed slowly unless someone's safety is at risk.

"It's important for the person to feel accepted and not judged," she notes. "When people ask for help, they need to know that whatever help is provided is being offered on ▶

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

3 **When the Burden Becomes Too Heavy**
Tips for Choosing a Mental Health Counselor

4 **Making Your Time Count**
Strategies for Simplifying Daily Caregiving Activities

6 **Reverse Mortgages**
Buying Time and Continuing to Live Independently

8 **Can Parrotting Penguins Help Elderly Maintain Balance?**

Subscriptions

Print: \$29.95 per year (U.S.)
Online: \$19.95 per year (U.S.)

**Call toll-free to subscribe:
1-877-259-1977**

Editor and Publisher
Chris Pederson

Senior Vice President, Sales & Marketing
Art Blumenthal

Marketing Director
Shelly Harvey

Strategic Business Development
Director
Karen B. Knowles

Custom Publishing & Operations
Director
Robert G. Whitton

Art Director
Laura D. Campbell

General Manager,
eCommerce & Online Services
Ed Cannon

Chief Financial Officer
Ted Stone

Webmaster
NOW Interactive Solutions
webmaster@caregivershome.com

Mail
Caregiver's Home Companion
P.O. Box 693
Southport, CT 06890-0693

Phones
Subscriptions & Customer Service:
(877) 259-1977

Advertising & Sales: (203) 257-6684
or (203) 254-0380 ext. 2

Administration & Editorial:
(203) 254-3538

Custom Publishing: (203) 438-0810

e-mail Inquiries:
editor@caregivershome.com

©Copyright 2006
Pederson Publishing, Inc.
All rights reserved.

Caregiver's Home Companion
is published monthly by:
Pederson Publishing, Inc.
P.O. Box 693,
Southport, CT 06890-0693

Visit us at www.caregivershome.com

Caregiver's Home Companion is produced by caregivers and professional healthcare workers. While this publication is not intended as a substitute for professionally administered medical advice, the practical suggestions, advice and tips made in this newsletter have been tested or reviewed by an individual or organization involved in caring for elderly other loved ones. Caregiver's Home Companion also strives to obtain the input of educators and researchers in all branches of medical and scientific research. We welcome your comments and suggestions at editor@caregivershome.com.

Checking In, Checking Up *Continued from page 1*

their own terms. I try to always ask 'How are you handling this situation right now? And what would you like to see happen?'

Like all caregivers, Hart knows she must tread delicately into conversations about one's ability to manage self-care or cope with the tasks that come with living independently. All too often, caregivers who "charge into action" find their attempts to help met with denial, resistance or downright hostility.

"When we tell our aging parents about our concerns, it's important to convey our concern for helping them to maintain living independently, if that's possible," says Dr. Linda Rhodes, former Secretary of Aging for the state of Pennsylvania and author of *Caregiving as Your Parents Age* (Penguin 2000). "Too often, what our aging parents fear is that we are really saying: It's not safe for you to live alone anymore. A better message is to let them know that we want to do whatever we can in helping them to remain active, independent and at home."

Rhodes believes the on-site observations of family caregivers or other providers are important but that it's also important to learn why a problem exists. For example, a poorly stocked refrigerator might be due to a lack of transportation, a lack of appetite or the inability to carry heavy packages from the car into the home.

To help family caregivers in getting a "snapshot" of how their loved one is doing, Rhodes offers these five suggestions:

- 1. Look around the house.** Poor housekeeping might due to a variety of factors including vision impairment, memory problems, depression or decreased physical abilities. It can be less threatening to ask if anything in the home is in need of repair or attention rather than to point out the shortcomings of an elder's housekeeping.
- 2. Check the refrigerator.** Is it well stocked with fresh produce and meats? Are there signs of a varied diet or is there an abundance of pre-made or processed foods that are high in salt and preservatives? Does your loved one have a supply of good drinking water? Even though tea and soda are popular beverages, they are also dehydrating. A poor diet could reflect any number of problems including problems with dentures, financial problems or simply a lack of planning.

If your loved one has a well-stocked refrigerator but shows signs of unexplained weight loss, a visit to a physician may be in order. Unexplained weight loss may be a symptom of a serious health issue such as

cancer, heart failure, dementia, depression or malnutrition.

- 3. Ask about their social life.** What social activities, friends and hobbies does your loved one enjoy? When was the last time he or she went to church? Has driving become more limited? Has your loved one stopped driving? Problems with transportation can lead quickly to social isolation. For many women, the risk of embarrassment due to bladder incontinence can be at the root of isolation. Another socially isolating health issue is hearing loss which not only limits one's participation in groups but also interferes with one's comprehension of conversations.
- 4. Let your loved one take you for a drive.** Rhodes advises family caregivers go along for a ride with their loved one but in the passenger's seat. Riding as a passenger allows you to observe a loved one's driving ability as well as a chance to notice if there are any new dents or scratches on the vehicle, which could indicate a driving issue.
- 5. Check out your elderly's medications.** If you see signs of confusion or forgetfulness in your loved one, it might be time to check your loved one's medications before jumping to the conclusion that they are in the early stages of Alzheimer's. "If your loved one takes five or more medications a day, then a discussion and review with the physician is in order," says Rhodes. "The risks that come with drug interaction or improper use are high."

Common problems in medication management include storing pills in unmarked bottles, not being able to read or understand prescription instructions, and storing expired pills with current medication. It's also important to also know that medications are stored properly, as improper storage can reduce a medication's effectiveness.

In addition to these five checkpoints, Rhodes offers five "action steps" to help family caregivers take effective measures in helping their aging loved ones:

Organize medications. Make a list of all medications. Help your loved one develop a system for storing and tracking medications. Use color coding systems, pill dispensers or large labels to help identify medications. Prepare and maintain a listing of all medications for doctor visits or unexpected trips to the hospital.

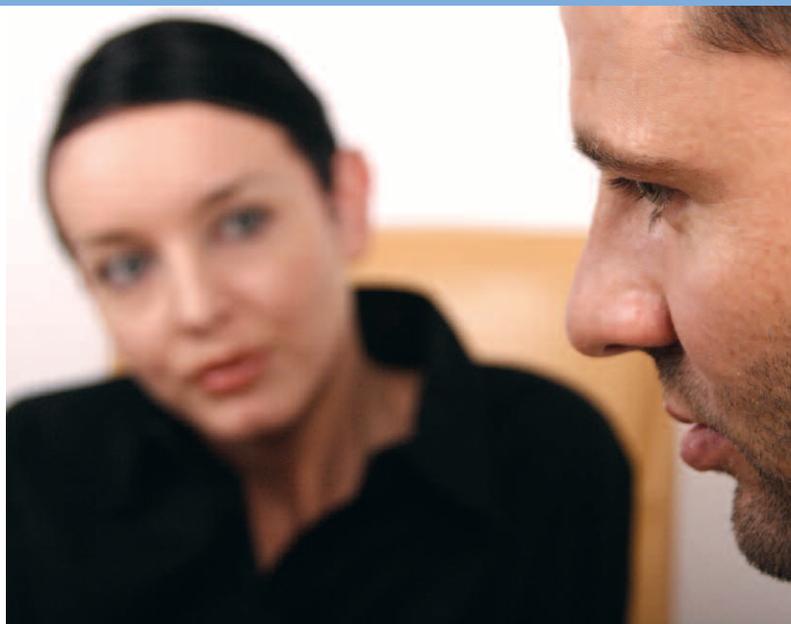
Get to know your loved one's support system. Introduce yourself to neighbors and friends. Enlist your elderly's physician or clergy as an ally. Obtain the phone book from your parent's community to learn what resources are available.

continues on page 7

When the Burden Becomes Too Heavy

Tips for Choosing a Mental Health Counselor

By Lori Ritchie



Caring for your own health is such a vital part of being an effective caregiver. Most of us think of caring for our bodies only when we are reminded about this necessity—eat healthy foods, exercise, and try to get enough rest, we're told.

These areas are certainly important, but so often we don't consider our mental health. The toll of providing care can become a burden to even the healthiest caregiver's mental well-being as shown through statistics that indicate more than half of all elder-caregivers have some degree of depression. Besides depression, there are issues of grief and adjustments in coping skills that, at some point, may best be worked on with the help of a qualified mental health professional.

Some caregivers may feel overwhelmed at the prospect of finding time for yet another appointment in their already demanding schedule of caregiving and other responsibilities. But remember this: taking time to take care of your mental well-being is definitely time well spent.

Donna Marie Berwald, a licensed mental health counselor in Fort Wayne, Indiana, says that while there are many indicators that it may be time to seek counseling, a couple stand out as very common: "Finding that you don't want to do anything—experiencing a loss in energy" and "getting short-tempered with other people outside of the individuals you are caring for."

But how does one find a qualified mental health counselor? Actually, there are several ways. Asking a trusted friend for a referral or a family doctor for a recommendation are possibilities. The Yellow Pages have listings, or there are various online directories for therapists and counselors. The National Board for Certified Counselors offers a referral phone service of certified counselors. They can be reached at 336-547-0607. Crisis lines and even clergy may be able to lead you in the direction of a good therapist. And many employers offer employee assistance programs (EAP) that provide limited counseling services and refer-

als as a company benefit. Taking advantage of any or several of these approaches is the first step.

Financial considerations are usually a concern for caregivers. Caregiving can be expensive in more areas than the physical and emotional demands placed on individuals in this role. If you are covered under a managed care insurance company through an employer, one of the first steps may involve checking with your benefits coordinator. They can inform you of the coverage your insurance plan allows for mental health services. There may be specific mental health providers included within an insurance company's network. This can be a good starting point for getting referrals.

Locating a qualified counselor is only part of the equation, however. Here are a few points to consider when deciding whether a mental health professional is right for you and your situation:

During the initial telephone interview:

- Determine whether the counselor has ever treated anyone with problems or concerns similar to the ones you are experiencing. Ask if the counseling was successful.
- Ask the therapist about their certifications and years of experience.
- Question the counselor about what prompted them to enter the mental health profession. The therapist may have dealt personally with some of the issues you are struggling with. Such personal experience can be a valuable tool in the counseling process.
- If you are interested in counseling services that integrate spiritual beliefs and principles, mention this to the counselor. This may not be their approach to counseling.
- Ask about fee structures, cancellation policies, and the therapist's availability to offer flexible appointments. Inform them of your caregiving responsibilities from the outset.
- Does the counselor offer group counseling with individuals who are struggling with similar issues you are hoping to deal with? This type of counseling is often less expensive and offers its own benefits. These group dynamics can also be

continues on page 4

Lori Ritchie is a writer, nursing student and experienced elder-caregiver in the Alzheimer's unit of a long-term care facility. She lives in Wollcott, Indiana, and can be reached at personalmedia@yahoo.com.

Tips for Choosing a Mental Health Counselor *Continued from page 3*

found in many community support groups though the benefit of this type of therapy is that it is facilitated by a mental health professional.

During your first appointment:

- Consider your comfort level with the therapist. Do you feel that you are compatible with this mental health professional?
- Observe the therapist's ability to listen to your concerns and feelings. The counselor may not be able to offer a lot of feedback and strategies for coping with your situation during your initial consult. Be prepared for the "process of therapy."
- Does the environment of the counseling setting put you at ease and provide you with a space that makes you feel safe with disclosing personal feelings and situations?
- The therapist should attempt to find out about your goals for entering counseling. Do you get a definite sense of the counselor's strategy in addressing your caregiving concerns?
- Does the counselor provide you with an emergency number or point of contact if the therapist is unavailable when you may need to talk outside of a scheduled appointment time?

The caregiving journey is unique for each individual. The need to seek a mental health professional may not arise in every individual's caregiving experience. But for the many caregivers who could use a boost, there is help available. The decision to seek such guidance when needed could be the best thing you've done for yourself in awhile. ■

RESOURCES

Online directory of therapists arranged by state, www.athealth.com/Consumer/directory/

Online directory that lists therapists, counselors, coaches, trainers, and educators in the mental health field, www.find-a-counselor.net/default.htm

Website that offers answers to common questions about counseling, www.athealth.com/Consumer/issues/counselanswer.html

Making Your Time Count

Strategies for Simplifying Daily Caregiving Activities

"Challenges are gifts that force us to search for a new center of gravity. Don't fight them. Just find a different way to stand."

Oprah Winfrey (1954–), O Magazine, October 2002

By Danielle N. Butin, MPH, OTR

As an occupational therapist, my work involves helping older adults "find new ways to stand" when faced with a challenge. I look for and regard an individual's strengths as an ally on the path to greater independence. For every challenge that presents itself, even those that seem overwhelming, there are many possible solutions. This article will provide a practical framework for thinking through challenges in order to generate real-life solutions in your caregiving.

Today, there are a multitude of resources available for older adults and their caregivers. Many products are available that promote ease and independence. But, how do you know what to purchase, what to try or what will really help the person you are caring for? The truth is you really need to understand the cause of a challenge, before you purchase products to help it.

Together, we will walk through and apply some basic rules you can use as a guide to better understand the cause of a functional challenge and a practical model for brainstorming solutions. The ultimate goal is to facilitate greater independence with daily living activities.

You need to understand the cause of a challenge before attempting to fix it. Unfortunately, there is no set formula or protocol for how to manage daily living challenges. For example, there is a big difference between helping someone who is unable to get in and out of the bathtub because they are stiff from arthritis and someone anxious about being short of breath. While the challenge is obvious (getting in and out of the tub), how to

help this person depends on why the challenge exists and its cause. Our goal is to generate solutions that match the cause—not just the challenge.

Let's begin using this practical problem-solving approach by applying the steps together:

Step 1: Define the Problem and Look for the Cause

I recently met with a 78-year-old man, a retired surgeon with Parkinson's disease. He takes many medications. His wife was concerned about how difficult it is for him to take his meds without her assistance. If she is away, he misses doses of his medicine and his tremors and symptoms worsen temporarily.

We know he needs help taking his medications. The question is, "Why is this happening? What causes his missed doses?" When questioned about his medications, he knew the reasons for each, as well as their corresponding doses and timing. Clearly, his memory and ability to think and process information is intact.

When asked about his perception of the cause of the problem, he said, "I shake too much—my tremors make it impossible for me to open my medicines on my own, hold them in my hands and bring them to my mouth without dropping them on the floor." The cause of the challenge was answered. This is a key part of the process. Older adults can help the caregiver to understand the cause of the

Danielle N. Butin is director of health services for Senior and Retiree Services (East Region) of UnitedHealthcare as well as a clinical instructor in occupational therapy at Columbia University. She can be reached at dbutin@oxhp.com.

challenge. After all, they know their bodies, their strengths and limitations, and they need to be engaged and empowered through the problem-solving process.

Step 2: Look for Your Elderly's Functional Strengths

Look for the strengths that remain and use them to make the challenge better. The retired surgeon was knowledgeable about his medications and did not need to be educated about their purpose or benefits. He was motivated to be independent and did not want to burden his wife with this responsibility.

Step 3: Use the 3-Pronged Approach

Decide which strategies, devices and/or home modifications you can use to make the activity easier. Use creativity to simplify challenges and manage causes. Let's apply this framework to the retired surgeon who cannot take his medications due to hand tremors:

1. **Strategy:** By leaning on the table for support and keeping his elbows and arms close to his chest, he can decrease tremors. Leaning on his forearms will bring his head closer to his hands and free his hands to take medicine.
2. **Devices:** By putting on light hand or wrist weights prior to taking his medicine, he can reduce the tremors in his hands. Using two small weighted cups may also decrease tremors. One cup can be left for him with water to take the meds and the other for him to store the meds until he needs to take them, while his wife is away.
3. **Home Modifications:** By leaving all supplies on the kitchen or dining room table (close to where he will be sitting), he can lean on the table to get the two cups and take his medicine independently.

If you employ this three-pronged approach, many caregiving challenges can be managed and improved. The example above is just that—an example; you can apply the process effectively in your own life. Just remember that it is crucial to always take a look at the cause and then brainstorm. Use as many resources as needed, and have fun creating possible solutions in each prong!

This approach works. In the end, the person you are caring for will feel empowered, more independent, and have greater satisfaction in their daily existence. Your willingness to try something new can help them find a new way to stand! ■

OTHER THREE-PRONGED EXAMPLES THAT WORK!

Challenge: Brushing teeth

Strengths: Wants to do it alone

Cause: Vision loss

Strategies: Use a toothbrush that contrasts with the color of the sink and use toothpaste that contrasts with the color of the toothbrush bristles. Store the toothbrush on a colored washcloth that contrasts with the sink, if needed.

Device: Toothpaste dispenser that positions your toothbrush at an easy angle and dispenses enough toothpaste when lever is pressed down.

Home Modifications: Brush teeth in most accessible, well lit space (kitchen sink or bathroom sink).

Challenge: Showering

Strengths: Can follow simple directions, has enjoyed showers in the past

Cause: Scared and confused due to dementia

Strategy: For brief periods, have your loved one sit in the bathroom with the shower running while doing something they enjoy. Goal is to desensitize them to the water by having them involved in something pleasurable while hearing the water run. Pleasurable desensitizing activities could include playing music, putting on lotion, looking at photos—anything!

Every day, move the person closer to shower while engaged in the alternate activity. Work up to placing just feet, then hands, then body in the shower water. When getting undressed, give one direction at a time (e.g. "take off this shoe...now this one" and provide help as needed).

Devices: Shower sprayer, padded shower seat for the shower, shower "grab bars" for support.

Home Modifications: Put flowered decals on the shower floor to show where the floor ends. Many people are confused by the depth of the floor. Keep walls simple colors and minimize clutter in the environment—otherwise it is often too stimulating and confusing.



READER RESOURCES:

Where Can I Find Resources for Strategies?

- For Physical Challenges: *Guide to Independent Living (For People with Arthritis)*, Arthritis Health Professions Association, 1988.
- For Memory/Cognitive Challenges: *The 36-Hour Day (A Family Guide to Caring for Persons with Alzheimer's Disease, Related Dementing Illnesses, and Memory Loss in Later Life)*, Nancy L. Mace and Peter V. Rabins, M.D., The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981.
- For Vision Challenges: *A Guide to Independence for the Visually Impaired and Their Families*, Vivian Younger, Jill Sardegna, Demos Medical Publishing, June 1994.

Where Can I Find Resources for Devices?

- Ableware Solutions for Seniors—Independent Living from Maddak, Inc. They offer a catalog. Phone **973-628-7600** or visit www.madac.com.
- Sammons Preston Rolyan, Phone **800-323-5547** or visit www.sammonspreston.com.

Where Can I Find Online Resources for Home Modifications?

- GEM Environmental Assessment, visit www.rebuildingtogether.org/downloads/home_safety_checklist.pdf and www.cornellaging.org/gem/enviro_assessment.pdf



Reverse Mortgages

Buying Time and Continuing to Live Independently

By Ursula Furi-Perry

With utility bills rising, energy costs soaring, and the future of Social Security arguably becoming less and less certain, your loved one may be elated to hear about a fairly new option for generating income and staying in their home.

If your loved one is over age 62 and lives in their own home, they may qualify for a reverse mortgage, a tool that can allow them to convert the equity in their home into cash. In essence, a reverse mortgage provides seniors money from a lender each month without having to sell their homes, allowing cash-poor homeowners to pay off monthly bills and remain independent longer.

On the positive, reverse mortgages appear to be a safe bet in the appropriate situation. "I think reverse mortgages are closely regulated," says George Middleton, CPA-CFS, a financial advisor at Limoges Investment Management PC in Vancouver, Washington. "They do a good job of providing information to the prospective buyer," making it less likely that a loved one will be duped into a daunting deal. "They're a great means of maintaining autonomy and independence," says Bronwyn Belling, reverse mortgage specialist at the AARP Foundation.

Not Right for Everyone

Yet not everyone is a good candidate for one. "Reverse mortgages are most appropriate for those seniors who are house-rich, but cash-poor," explains Paul N. Winter, principal of Five Seasons Financial Planning in Holladay, Utah. "They should be used as a last line of defense against running out of money in retirement. For that reason, I don't think they should be

used to fund non-essential items (such as vacations, boats, recreation, or for short-term needs, since origination fees are quite steep." Belling describes the typical borrower as a widowed woman in her mid-70s, living in a house worth about \$250,000. "Everyone's needs and circumstances are different," says Belling. "Even if you have two identical houses in a neighborhood, amounts can vary as to how much they can borrow."

"One aspect that might make reverse mortgages 'too good to be true' is that mortgage rates are variable and are currently shifting," says Winter. "While they do come with caps, interest expense may increase over time." Though many experts say rates on reverse mortgages aren't outrageous, they may not be the best deals out there when compared with conventional loans. As such, experts advise caregivers and loved ones to research and discuss other possible options before signing up for a reverse mortgage. For example, "if someone needs home repair or some help with utility bills, there may be some local programs (that are more advantageous)," Belling says.

Fees may be another concern, making reverse mortgages unnecessarily costly. "The fees are 'hidden' in the sense that they are tacked on to the loan balance and interest is paid on them the entire time the loan is outstanding," says Middleton. "The fees don't really come to light until it is time to repay the loan." Belling points out that most fees are paid out of the equity and spread out; as a result, she recommends that borrowers plan to remain in the house for a long period of time to come.

Can Result in Less Freedom

"Also, the vast majority of reverse mortgages come with limits as to size, so homeowners may not be able to take full advantage of the recent appreciation of their homes," Winter states. And reverse mortgages may even mean less freedom, experts say. "Normally the loan is due upon death of the homeowners, but what if the home owners want or need to move, say into a nursing home?" Middleton points out. "That could trigger a repayment clause."

Belling says some provisions are in place for such situations: if a lone borrower or both joint borrowers have to move into a nursing home, say, or receive medical treatment that prohibits them to live at home, the mortgage stays intact for up to a 12-month consecutive period. Additionally, if one borrower remains in the home—one of the primary reasons for taking out a loan—the mortgage stays in effect as well, with nothing due.

Upon all borrowers moving out of the home, selling the home, or passing away, the reverse mortgage becomes due. This may influence the loved one's estate planning, as the heirs will be responsible for any bank payments upon death. That may mean selling the home and paying off the mortgage before distributing the remaining assets.

Who Owns the House?

It's also important to dispel the popular myth that the lender "owns" the house when a reverse mortgage is placed on it.

Ursula Furi-Perry is a writer based in Haverhill, Massachusetts. She can be reached at furiperry@verizon.net.

"The owner is still the owner of the home, and responsible for taxes and insurance," says Belling. "It becomes much more important to protect the house and make sure it's maintained and occupied because it's the sole collateral for the loan...and has to be the primary residence according to the IRS's definition."

As for picking the right financial institution, "the program is fairly uniform, so the actual provider is not that big of an issue in my view," says Middleton. Because rates are regulated in the industry, one major factor when deciding on the right financial institution may be closing costs, Winter says. Caregivers should help their elderly by researching lenders thoroughly and asking around for references.

Also, get all quotes and other information in writing so you can better compare rates and choose the most favorable one for your loved one. "Candidates may also be required to visit a counselor as a prerequisite anyway, and this counseling may be useful as an educational process," adds Winter.

All in all, reverse mortgages may be a great tool when the situation is right, but they should come about after plenty of research and thinking. "I view a reverse mortgage as a last resort," says Middleton. "It should only be considered if there is a gap between monthly expenses and monthly income that cannot be resolved some other way." Adds Belling, "Reverse mortgages can be really helpful when the caregiver has exhausted other resources. Sometimes, they're not a permanent solution, but may allow someone to buy more time and care for their loved one as they would like to." ■

RESOURCES

The National Center for Home Equity Conversion, independent consumer website on reverse mortgages, www.reverse.org/

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, reverse mortgage pages, www.hud.gov/buying/rvrsmort.cfm

National Reverse Mortgage Lenders Association website, www.reversemortgage.org/

AARP, reverse mortgage information, www.aarp.org/money/revmort/

Federal Trade Commission's information about reverse mortgages, www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/homes/rms.htm

Checking In, Checking Up

Continued from page 2

Begin a conversation. Start talking with your loved one, I mean *really* talking. Approach the conversation as the first step in learning their needs and wishes. Be sure to let your parent know that you are asking so you can follow their wishes if at all possible.

Look into a geriatric assessment. Seek out a physician who has training in geriatrics along with a geriatric social worker or care manager. A thorough geriatric assessment can be very helpful in getting families to sit down together to discuss concerns as well as to provide an objective view about a loved one's care needs.

Tackle Medicare or managed care paperwork. Helping your loved one decide upon needed coverage is one of the best things you can do to help a loved one meet his or her health needs as well as make the best use of financial resources. For example and very timely: Help your loved one determine which Medicare Part D drug plan is best suited for their needs.

If you're already concerned about the well-being of a loved one, taking these steps will help ensure that your loved one receives the help they need. Even if your loved one does not need

help today, taking these same steps can be a valuable early intervention in helping a loved one maintain their well-being, safety and independence. ■

RESOURCES:

ElderCare.Gov (www.eldercare.gov) provides information and assessment tools to aid family caregivers in making informed decisions and finding resources.

Caregiver Kits are available from www.lindarhodes.com. Notebooks and worksheets provide helpful tools in tracking pertinent information about a loved one's care needs and in obtaining needed medical, legal and financial documents.

The National Resource Center on Supportive Housing and Home Modification has a wide variety of links offering assessment tools, tips for home safety, use of technology and adaptive equipment. Visit www.homemods.org/pages/safety-assess.shtml.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission offers a room-by-room checklist to evaluate and resolve safety issues at www.cpsc.gov/cpsc/pub/pubs/701.html.

The National Safety Council (www.nsc.org/issues/ifalls/faltips.htm) has tips to help you care for aging parents.

COMING UP IN FEBRUARY

- **How technology is fast changing the elder-caregiving landscape,** from tracking dementia patients to monitoring the movements of our parents in their homes and more.
- **Give me a break!** Finding caregiver relief through community-based volunteer programs.
- **The Green House Project is changing the way long-term care is provided** to frail elderly by offering autonomy, dignity, privacy and choice. We'll tell you about this innovation in assistive living that could be in your community before long.
- **Elderly Dental Diligence.** Keeping Mom and Dad healthy in old age through good dental care.

Need Your Email Address

One of the benefits of being a subscriber to this newsletter is complete and unrestricted access to our website at www.caregivershome.com, including all back issues of this publication. Another benefit is receiving at no cost the weekly news update *The Caregiver's Hotline*, which is sent to email in-boxes each Tuesday.

But we need your email address in order to pass along these important subscriber benefits. If you didn't provide us with your email address when you subscribed, please send it to us now at Editor@CaregiversHome.com and we'll get you signed up right away.

Can Parroting Penguins Help Elderly Maintain Balance?



OK, SO PENGUINS LOOK LIKE CUTE LITTLE FORMAL WAITERS IN their black-and-white “tuxedo” coats, waddling around in frosty climes. But there’s much more at work there than meets the eye—at least Texas researchers think so.

New research conducted at the University of Houston indicates that the elderly may improve their balance and not stumble as they walk if they learn to waddle like penguins. That’s right, by rocking from side to side as they shuffle forward.

Shaky balance befalls many of us as we age, sometimes resulting in broken and slow-to-mend bones and generally rattling the confidence of seniors who may eventually become immobilized by a fear of falling.

Max Kurz, a biomechanics professor and study leader, says the elderly have inherent instability in their side-to-side movement patterns that are controlled through the nervous system. As people age, their nervous systems deteriorate and walking patterns become more inconsistent, which can lead to instability and falls.

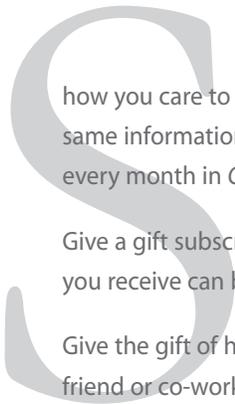
“Compared to other terrestrial animals, penguins have an excessive amount of side-to-side, waddling motion,” Kurz said. “If humans waddle too much they fall, but penguins somehow overcome this. They may have an elegant movement strategy for stability that we’re unaware of.”

To prove his point, Kurz and UH colleagues are monitoring the waddling behavior of king penguins and thus far have concluded that the waddling might actually help their balance. They’ve also taught college students to waddle like penguins, hoping to determine whether training people with mobility problems to walk this way might help them stay stable.

Kurz believes penguins have learned to use the waddling motion in a way that makes their movements more efficient, adjusting for the limitations of the size of their legs and their weight. Humans, on the other hand, have not developed such a mechanism to adjust for such dramatic side-to-side motion. So, if we simply waddle, chances are we’ll fall, but some aspects of a penguin’s wobble could be very beneficial.

“We can envision a scenario where elderly may be able to put their walkers or canes down because they’ve learned to make the same adjustments in their walking patterns,” Kurz said. “This research may aid in developing a way to teach those people how to walk more efficiently despite their side-to-side motion, to learn the same kind of stability as the penguin.” ■

Give the Lasting Gift of Care



how you care to those around you who can benefit from the same information, tips, advice and how-to features you receive every month in *Caregiver's Home Companion*.

Give a gift subscription to the newsletter so the help and benefit you receive can be shared by others you care about.

Give the gift of help—a gift subscription to a family member, friend or co-worker.

Or donate an anonymous gift subscription which we will use to benefit an individual in need of the knowledge and support *Caregiver's Home Companion* provides, but may not be able to afford the few extra dollars to subscribe. We will see that your gift is properly assigned to a needy caregiver.*

We all know the importance of “care.” This is your chance to share your care with a gift subscription to help others.

Call NOW toll free at (877) 259-1977, or fill out the simple gift subscription form online at <https://www.caregivershome.com/subscriptions/giftsubscriptions.cfm>.

* Note: anonymous subscription donations may only be submitted by using our toll free phone line.

