

Caring



Caring is a publication of the Department of Senior Programs & Services
Spring 2009

... A newsletter for the family caregiver

Andrew J. Spano, Westchester County Executive

Mae Carpenter, Commissioner Dept. of Senior Programs & Services



From County Executive Andy Spano

County Programs Offer a Little Peace

Caregivers need all the help they can get.

So, I'd like to tell you about two programs that might not make your day-to-day tasks any easier -- but should help you sleep a bit easier at night.

Do you ever worry about what would happen in an emergency if you couldn't get to the loved one you care for quickly? You should learn about Westchester County's Special Needs Registry.

The registry is a list of residents who may need additional assistance, transportation or a place to stay should a major emergency or disaster occur. Consider signing up your loved ones for the registry if you know they would have trouble leaving their homes quickly in such situations. The program is designed to help Westchester residents who have a physical or mental disability and live independently.

You can register by calling 211 or apply on line by visiting www.westchestergov.com/specialneeds. (You can also visit that website for more information about the program.) Applicants for the registry will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. You should know that we keep your information confidential, only sharing it with local, county, state and federal agencies that might be involved in an emergency response.

The Special Needs Registry is not meant for people who live in nursing homes or other facilities, because they have their own emergency plans in place.

And, by the way, you can also find plenty of useful information on emergency planning, including tips on how to create a family emergency plan and what to do during power outages, by visiting www.westchestergov.com/keepingsafe.htm.

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From Deputy Commissioner Diane Aparisio

Mental Toll of Caregiving

Caregiving often involves a list of chores, the juggling of schedules and not much in the way of thanks. So, not surprisingly, it also can spawn a load of stress.

If you are a caregiver, you already know that living with or caring for a relative or friend who is infirm or suffers dementia is not easy. Family caregivers who provide care 36 or more hours weekly are more likely than non-caregivers to experience symptoms of depression or anxiety. For spouses, the rate is six times higher; for those caring for a parent the rate is twice as high.

Many of the baby boom generation are currently caregivers and may expect to be caregivers for at least 10 or 15 years. According to the National Family Caregivers Association, about 15 percent of caregivers are between the ages of 45 to 54; another 30 percent of family caregivers are 60 or over.

The implications of these statistics are particularly daunting when applied to Westchester County. Currently one in five Westchester County residents is over 60. When we apply the national percentages for depression in older adults, it is estimated that approximately 22,000 Westchester seniors are at risk this year.

How can you tell if caregiving is putting too much stress on you? Do you have any of the following symptoms?

- feeling overwhelmed
- sleeping too much or too little
- gaining or losing a lot of weight
- feeling tired most of the time
- loss of interest in activities you used to enjoy

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From the Deputy Commissioner *Cont'd from page 1*

- becoming easily irritated or angered, or feeling constantly worried
- often feeling sad
- frequent headaches, bodily pain, or other physical problems
- abuse of alcohol or drugs, including prescription drugs

Talk to a counselor, psychologist, or other mental health professional right away if your stress leads you to physically or emotionally harm the person you are caring for, or if you are having those thoughts.

What can you do to prevent or relieve stress?

To begin with, never dismiss your feelings as "just stress." Caregiver stress can lead to serious health problems and you should take steps to reduce it as much as you can.

Research shows that people who take an active, problem-solving approach to caregiving issues are less likely to feel stressed than those who react by worrying or feeling helpless. For instance, someone with dementia may ask the same question over and over again, such as, "Where is Mary?" A positive way

of dealing with this would be to say, "Mary is not here right now," and then distract the person. You could say, "Let's start getting lunch ready," or involve the person in simple tasks, such as folding laundry.

There are classes and programs that can teach you how to care for someone with the disease that your loved one is facing. To find support, ask your doctor or contact an organization that focuses on this disease. In Westchester, start with our county Family Caregiver Support Program at 914-245-9167.

Here are some more tips for reducing caregiver stress:

- Find out about caregiving resources in your community. Join a support group for caregivers in your situation, such as caring for someone with dementia.
- Ask for and accept help.
- If you need financial help taking care of a relative, don't be afraid to ask family members to contribute their fair share.
- Don't feel guilty that you are not a "perfect" caregiver. You're doing the best you can.
- Identify what you can and cannot change. You may

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Visit a Caregiver Resource Center Caregiver Resource Service Centers provide advice, information and services to assist caregivers in their role of caring for an elderly family member. Our five Full Service Centers are staffed by professionals who can provide direct services and referrals. Please call to make an appointment at any of the following centers:

Westchester County
Department of Senior
Programs and Services
9 So. 1st. Ave., 10th Floor,
Mt. Vernon, NY 10550
(914) 813-6300

Northern County Senior Services
1974 Commerce St., 3rd. Floor,
Yorktown Heights, NY 10598
(914) 245-9167

ElderServe
6 Executive Plaza
Yonkers, N.Y. 10701
(914)368-5508

Yonkers Office for the Aging
2 Park Ave., Yonkers, NY 10701
(914) 377-6822

Alzheimer's Association
2900 Westchester Ave., Suite 306
Purchase, N.Y. 10577
(914) 253-6360

Resource Centers You can find literature, Internet resources, videos and other information on caregiving in designated sections at the following local libraries:

Greenburgh Public Library
300 Tarrytown Road
(914) 993-1600

Ossining Public Library
53 Croton Ave.
(914) 941-2416

Rye Free Reading Room
1061 Boston Post Road
(914) 967-0480

Somers Library
Route 139, Reis Park
(914) 232-5717

Scarsdale Public Library
54 Olmstead Road
(914)722-1300

Warner Library- Tarrytown
121 N. Broadway
(914) 631-7734

Katonah Village Library
26 Bedford Road
(914) 232-3508

Field Library -Peekskill
4 Nelson Ave.
(914) 737-1212

John C. Hart Memorial Library
1130 Main Street, Shrub Oak
(914)245-5262

White Plains Library
100 Martine Ave.
(914) 422-1400

New Rochelle Library
One Library Plaza, 3rd. Fl.
(914) 632-7878

Port Chester Library
1 Haseco Ave.
(914) 939-6710

**Caring
Staff**

Executive Editor: Diane Aparisio, Deputy Commissioner
Managing Editor: Mary Edgar-Herrera, Program Administrator
Editor: Marie Cortissoz

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- Set realistic goals. Break large tasks into smaller steps.
- Prioritize, make lists, and establish a daily routine.
- Stay in touch with family and friends. Make time each week to do something that you want to do.
- Try to find time to be physically active, eat a healthy diet and get enough sleep.
- See your doctor for a checkup. Tell her that you are a caregiver and tell her about any symptoms of depression or sickness you may be having.
- Try to keep your sense of humor.
- If you work outside the home and are feeling overwhelmed, consider taking a break from your job. Employees covered under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act may be able to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave per year to care for relatives. Ask your human resources office about options for unpaid leave.

As caregivers, we also need to understand the difference between a normal case of the blues and depression. The term “depression” is often used to describe a low mood to severe depression, so it is easy to become confused over whether sad feelings are normal or serious. Everyone feels sad, blue or depressed from time to time. But sometimes these feelings become so intense that they interfere with a person’s ability to think, work, eat, sleep, enjoy being with others or care for themselves. Depression that disables a life requires immediate attention and treatment.

Where to get help

You don’t have to solve the problem all by yourself. To find mental health professionals, contact your doctor, the county Department of Mental Health or Department of Senior Programs and Services.

Remember, depression is treatable. There are many resources available to help people move out of their depression and back toward a happier life.

Free Events for Caregivers

This spring and summer, there will be myriad chances to learn more about caregiving and the support that is out there to help people who are caring for an elderly or ill relative or friend. The following free events are being offered for caregivers:

- On June 10, from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m., there will be a Livable Communities Caregiver Resource Fair at the White Plains Hospital Center, Davis Avenue and Post Road, White Plains. The fair will offer an opportunity to learn about services available to those caring for an elderly loved one or friend. This event is free and open to the public. Keynote speaker Barbara Silverstone, co-author of “You and Your Aging Parents: A Family Guide to Emotional, Social, Health & Financial Problems,” will speak at 6 p.m. Information will be available on Alzheimer’s, adult day care, Caregiver Resource Centers, elder law, in-home services, Medicaid, Medicare, respite, Project Lifesaver, and support groups. Refreshments will be served. For further information and to make reservations, call: Mary Edgar-Herrera at 914-245-9167. Parking is available for a fee at the Municipal lot on Longview Avenue between Maple and Post.
- On June 16, attend a program at the James Harmon Center, Main St., Hastings. The program, to be held from 3:30 p.m. to 5 p.m., will offer advice on “Planning Ahead for Your Loved One.”
- On June 18, a program will be held at Drum Hill Senior Living, 90 Ringgold St., Peekskill. The topic of the 7 p.m. session is “Caregivers: It’s Your Healthcare Too.”
- On June 23, caregivers can learn more “Taking Care of You.” It will be held at 7 p.m. at Phelps Memorial Hospital Center, N. Broadway, Sleepy Hollow.
- On July 16, learn about “Planning Ahead for Your Loved One” The 7 p.m. program will be held at Drum Hill Senior Living, 90 Ringgold St., Peekskill.
- On July 20, a second program on “Planning Ahead for Your Loved One” will be held at Mt. Pleasant Community Center, 125 Lozza Drive, Valhalla. The program will run from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.
- On July 21, get tips and advice on “Talking to Your Doctor.” The program will be held at the James Harmon Center, Main Street, Hastings, from 3:30 p.m. to 5 p.m.

All of the above programs are sponsored by the Family Caregiver Support Program of the Westchester County Department of Senior Programs and Services. For more information, call Mary Edgar-Herrera at 914-245-9167.

Join the Mailing List

If you would like to be on our mailing list for future issues of *Caring*, please call 245-9167.

Message from the County Executive

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Project Lifesaver

I also want to remind you about another program that is tailor made for caregivers: Project Lifesaver.

The Project Lifesaver program fits eligible seniors, primarily people with Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia, with bracelets that can literally save their lives. Should they then wander from their homes, specifically trained and equipped police from Westchester County's Department of Public Safety can find them using radio signals that the bracelets transmit.

Since the project began last summer, the bracelets already have helped seniors who have wandered off while wearing them. In April, for example, an elderly White Plains woman who got lost after separating from her caretaker was found in less than an hour thanks to the electronic bracelet she was wearing. White Plains police and officers from the Westchester County Department of Public Safety used Project Lifesaver tracking equipment to find the woman at South Lexington Avenue in downtown White Plains, several blocks from where she had initially wandered away.

The Project Lifesaver program has so far given transmitter bracelets to 35 local seniors who suffer from Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia and are prone to wandering – and more are available. I think the project is particularly valuable for caregivers. Obviously, the program's primary goal is to help keep safe seniors who are prone to wandering – and, if they do wander, help to quickly return them to their homes. But another important aim of the program is to try to ease some of the enormous anxiety families feel when they know their loved one might wander off one day and end up getting harmed or worse.

Project Lifesaver sponsors are Westchester County's Departments of Senior Programs and Services, and Public Safety in partnership with the Hebrew Home for the Aged at Riverdale and International Project Lifesaver. Lately, there have been free open-enrollment programs. To find out when the next session is scheduled or to ask questions about the program, contact Melody Keel, program specialist, at the ElderServe Safe Center for Seniors at (914) 368-5506, or email her at mkeel@hebrewhome.org.



Salute to Seniors: The recent Salute at Westchester County Center in White Plains provided a day of fun, entertainment and information for hundreds of seniors, including caregivers. Mary Edgar-Herrera, who administers the county Family Caregiver Support Program, handed out a variety of booklets and answered questions throughout the day. For more information and ideas, or if you would like to receive the free brochure "Share the Caring," call (914)245-9167.

Happy Time for Grandchildren

Last year's holiday season was a happy time for many of the grandchildren being raised by grandparents and relative caregivers. The Westchester County Grandparents Coalition coordinated a gift drive and was able to help 171 grandchildren. The gifts were donated by ITT Corporation, Union Church of Pocantico Hills, Smart Love Cherish Helpers Club, Westchester County Department of Social Services and Department of Senior Programs and Services and many private individuals.

For some of the children, this gift was the only one they received during the holidays. Grandparents struggling to support their grandchildren with basic needs often can't afford luxuries like Christmas gifts.

The Grandparents Coalition meets every two months at various locations. The Coalition is unique in that it brings together agency professionals and grandparents who are the front lines of raising grandchildren. Members assist the coalition with advocacy issues, coordinating activities, organizing educational programs, etc. Individuals interested in joining the coalition or obtaining information can contact Corina De León, at (914) 813-6393 or e-mail at cdd2@Westchestergov.com

Caring Cooking

Smothered Chicken

Ingredients:

- 4 4-oz pieces boneless, skinless chicken
- 1/4 cup safflower oil
- 1 large onion, sliced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- Fresh ground pepper to taste
- 1/2 tsp thyme
- 2 cups water
- 1 1/2 cups sliced carrots
- 1 1/2 cups green peas, fresh or frozen

Directions

Heat the oil in a deep sauce pan or Dutch oven. Add the chicken and brown on both sides, about 3 - 4 minutes per side. Pour off the excess oil, then add the onion, garlic, pepper and thyme. Add the water, then cover the pot and bring to a boil. Lower the heat and simmer 1 1/2 - 2 hours. Add the carrots and peas. Cover the pot and return to a boil. Then lower the heat and simmer for another 20 - 30 minutes.

Makes 4 servings. Calories: 393; Total Fat: 21 g; Sodium: 186 mg

Guide for Caregivers

Caring for an elderly person can be a demanding job. The Westchester County Department of Senior Programs and Services offers a free guide that is filled with practical advice.

“A Guide for Caregivers: What You Need to Know” has 23 pages of advice on topics such as how to balance work and caregiving, challenges and frustrations caregivers face, how to cope with stress, how to talk to health-care professionals about your loved one and what to do when your loved one resists care.

The guide also presents information on why caregivers must take care of their own physical and mental well-being and gives tips on how to do so. Other chapters discuss ways to make homes safe for the elderly and “long-distance” caregiving, which occurs when, say, a parent and adult child, live in different states.

Also available is DSPTS’ “A Guide for Caregiver: Respite Services and Caregiver Support Groups.” Both are available on the DSPTS Web site at www.westchestergov.com/seniors.



An Answer to Your Questions

Ask Mary Edgar-Herrera

Q. I have been caring for my elderly father for the past year. Recently I have noticed he has been drinking more than usual. Should I be concerned?

A. You may be right to be concerned. People may turn to alcohol to relieve stress or depression, but this can lead to many other problems. First of all, older adults process alcohol more slowly than a younger person. This in turn causes the alcohol to have a stronger effect on the body. If your father is taking medicines, drinking alcohol may be harmful. Depending on the drug, it can lead to excessive sleepiness, confusion, internal bleeding, liver damage or, in some cases, death. It is always best to talk to the doctor or pharmacist about any interactions with alcohol that his medications may have.

You may want to start a conversation with your father, by telling him how much you care for him and want him to be healthy. Ask him if he is worried, stressed or having difficulties in his life. Tell him you are concerned about his drinking and would like to help him cope in other, healthier ways. If alcohol has become a problem for him, treatment options are available and include 12-step programs, individual counseling, medications and hospitalization. For more information, call the Family Caregiver Support Program at 914-245-9167.

On the Web

For information on caregiving programs, senior housing, Medicare and other benefits, visit the County Department of Senior Programs and Services' website, www.westchestergov.com/seniors

In Brief

Dial New York Connects!

New York Connects, a service that people can call to quickly and easily learn about long-term care options in Westchester County for seniors and disabled adults and children, has a new telephone number: (914) 813-6300.

The service helps callers become aware of the various long-term care options for their particular situation. Armed with that information, they can make better-informed decisions on the best choices for themselves and their loved ones.

Long-term care involves medical and non-medical services, and NY Connects can provide information on both, such as Medicaid and Medicare, in-home and out-of-home care, transportation, health, recreation, advocacy, insurance and financial planning.

As people sort out the various options, they may decide, for example, that assisted-living housing best fits their needs. Or, they might see that a combination of adult day care and physical therapy would be a better fit. NY Connects can also provide information about short-term care, perhaps if a person needs rehabilitation or home care after an illness or accident.

Calls are answered by trained specialists and all calls are confidential. Help is provided in many languages, and TTY is available for the hearing-impaired. NY Connects – Westchester Choices for Long-Term Care is a joint, state-funded initiative of the Westchester County Departments of Senior Programs and Services and Social Services and the Office for the Disabled.

Get Generations

Westchester County publishes *Generations*, a free, general-interest newspaper for seniors. The paper,

which is mailed to subscribers six times a year, has a special section on caregiving. It also offers news on health, money matters, travel, and entertainment -- as well as fun profiles of celebrities and other county residents.

To get your free subscription, visit www.westchestergenerations.org

Get Moving

It's important for caregivers to think of themselves – and their own health. And, that means trying to get regular exercise.

The federal Centers for Disease Control recommends that older adults design an exercise plan consisting of activities they enjoy and that match their abilities.

Try to do a variety of activities. This can make physical activity more enjoyable and reduce your risk of injury. You don't have to go to a gym to engage in aerobic activity – exercise that gets you breathing harder and your heart beating faster. Pushing a lawn mower, taking a dance class or walking to the store are all considered aerobic activities, as long as you're doing them at a moderate or vigorous intensity for at least 10 minutes at a time.

Remember, if your caregiving responsibilities or an illness forces you to take a break from your regular workout routine, be sure to start again at a lower level and slowly work back up to your usual level of activity.

Exercise may also benefit the person you care for. Some older adults are at risk for falling because they've fallen in the past or have trouble walking. Older adults who are at risk for falling should do exercises that help them with balance.

The CDC recommends that balance training be done at least 3 days a week and should include standardized exercises from a program that's been proven to reduce falls. These exercises might include backward walking, sideways walking, heel walking, toe walking, and practicing standing from a sitting position. Tai chi, a form of martial arts developed in China, may also help with balance.

Older adults with health conditions such as arthritis, diabetes, or heart disease can still be active. Regular physical activity can improve quality of life and even reduce the risk of developing other conditions.

Talk with your doctor to find out if your loved one's health condition limits their ability to be active. Then, work with your doctor to come up with a physical activity plan that matches their abilities.

For more information about adding physical activity to your life, visit www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/

Questions about Medicare?

The county Department of Senior Programs and Services' Medicare Information Line is open year-round to help seniors with Medicare issues. If you need help, call (914) 813-6100.

Staff can answer questions you may have about your own or your loved one's Medicare Parts A, B, C and D, Medigap insurance, cost-sharing, preventive benefits and appeals.

The Medicare Information Line can also answer questions about New York State's Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage, which is known as EPIC and helps eligible seniors pay prescription drug costs.