Message from the Coordinator

April 16th is recognized each year as National Healthcare Decisions Day to inspire, educate and empower the public and providers about the importance of advance care planning. This is a national initiative to encourage adults of all ages to plan ahead of a health crisis.

Making decisions ahead of time and putting your wishes in writing brings peace of mind to families. It helps to avoid the difficult situations that are so common when a person becomes seriously ill and the family is left to guess what their loved one would have wanted.

Planning ahead can be a gift. A plan can be made at any time in your life. It gives you and your loved ones peace of mind and it helps prevent questions, confusion, and disagreements among family members. When having a plan it advises health care providers what you want if you are unable to speak for yourself.

When making your plan, write down your care wishes and preferences while you are able. Talk with family members about your living will or advance directive and decide who will be responsible for making decisions if you cannot. A lack of planning has economic consequences like unnecessary medical expenses for treatment, hospital stays, and nursing homes.

On May 15, 2015 the Vanderbilt Child & Family Center can assist in the planning process. The Child and Family Center will be hosting a FREE Legal Advice on Estate Planning event. Attorneys will be available to answer your specific questions regarding Power of Attorney, Living Will, Advance Directives, Last Will and Testament, Trust, Probate, and Conservatorship.

The FREE Legal Advice on Estate Planning event will be held in Light Hall Room 437 from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. This event will be first-come, first served so you may have to wait. Plan to arrive no later than 1:30 p.m. so you can be seen. Each consultation will be approximately 30 minutes. This event is open to faculty and employees of Vanderbilt.

While making healthcare decisions is often difficult, making decisions for others is even more complicated. YOUR DECISIONS MATTER!!!

Learn more about advance planning and watch a video highlighting the value of advance care planning at www.nhdd.org.
Chronic Illness, Loneliness May Go Hand-in-Hand for Some Elderly
Don’t blame yourself for illness and try to find new ways to socialize, experts suggest
By: Robert Preidt (writer for Medline Plus)

For people age 70 or older who struggle with a chronic illness, loneliness is often a complicating factor, a new study finds.

Canadian researchers looked at 12 older adults, mostly in their 70s. They found that feelings of loneliness rose after the onset of chronic health problems—even among those who had been with the same partner for 50 years or more.

“The quality of our social ties plays a role when it comes to coping with the effects of serious disease in later life. And just having a partner around may not be enough,” study first author, Megan Barlow, of the Personality, Aging, and Health Lab at Concordia University in Montreal, said in a university news release.

The study was published recently in the journal Health Psychology.

Older adults with chronic illness can reduce their risk of loneliness by trying to remain positive about their health challenge and not blaming themselves for the illness, the researchers said. Strategies like those can help them stay motivated to socialize and prevent depression, Barlow’s team said.

Isolating oneself is not going to help, Barlow stressed.

“Putting a halt to socializing only contributes to a downward spiral,” she said. “Dealing with a chorionic illness shouldn’t prevent you from still trying to get our there if you.”

She believes that socially needs to find ways to help older adults with chronic illness remain socially engaged.

“The fact that loneliness can lead to further complications means that measures can be taken to prevent the effects from looping back around,” Barlow said. “Finding different ways to connect with other people also means you are less likely to blame yourself for being sick, and you can’t count on a partner to fill that gap.”
Should You Tell a “Fiblet” to a Parent With Dementia?

Geriatric care managers offer advice on a sensitive topic.

From our earliest days we are taught never to lie, especially to our mother or father. However, a recent survey of aging experts reveals that telling a “fiblet” can actually be therapeutic when adult children are faced with telling painful truths to aging parents who have a cognitive impairment such as Alzheimer’s disease.

The National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers (NAPGCM) recently surveyed 285 professional geriatric care managers about the most common and difficult situations faced by families who are helping aging parents. Geriatric care managers help these families deal with some of the most sensitive and challenging issues.

More than 90 percent of the professional geriatric care managers surveyed said they have used or recommended the “fiblet” strategy to relieve stress and anxiety and protect the self-esteem of an elderly person. The situation cited most by experts in the survey as an appropriate and helpful use of a “fiblet” is when a senior is refusing clearly needed care or assistance at their home. For example, telling an aging parent with Alzheimer’s that a paid caregiver is coming to their home for their spouse’s benefit or for another concrete role can help the elder maintain pride and reduce anxiety.

The following were identified by care managers as situations when it can actually be therapeutic to tell a “fiblet” to an aging parent:

- **When they are refusing needed care** and assistance at home. Telling them the caregiver is there for their spouse’s benefit or for another concrete role can help them maintain pride and reduce anxiety (identified by 83 percent of those surveyed).
- **When they can no longer safely drive**, yet insist on doing so. Telling them their car is in the shop getting repaired can reduce confrontations (68 percent).
- **When knowing the cost of in-home care** prevents them from accepting the needed service (68 percent).
- **When it would only cause worry and stress** to tell them about family problems they can’t solve, e.g., unemployment, financial upheaval, divorce, drug abuse, incarceration (64 percent).

According to the National Institutes of Health, as many as 5 million of the 43 million Americans age 65 and older may have Alzheimer’s disease, and another 1.8 million people have some other form of dementia. Americans feel increasingly challenged by the need to communicate difficult information to aging family members with dementia.

“A therapeutic “fiblet” is just that—it is therapeutic because it calms and reassures, reduces anxiety and protects self-esteem,” said NAPGCM President Emily Saltz. She added, “You would use a ‘fiblet’ only with parents who have a cognitive impairment such as Alzheimer’s disease.”

I am a Caregiver
By Lin M. Watkins

I am a caregiver
it’s what I do.
24/7, I’m here for you.

And most of the time
we do just fine
But once in a while,
I need my own time.

And when I take
that necessary break
I’ve got to remember
it’s for both our sake.

I can’t take care of you
unless I take care of me.
So I work very hard
at being guilt-free.

I’ll always be here for you,
so don’t you fret.
Together we’re making
memories of us I’ll never forget.

Source: http://www.caregiver.com/articles/careverses/im_a_caregiver.htm

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Upcoming Events
The Virtual Dementia tour will be held on Wednesday April 22, 2015 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. in the alley between Langford and Eskind Library. This is your opportunity to see life through the eyes of someone with Dementia or Alzheimer’s. All slots for the April 22nd event are taken. We will be bringing the Virtual Dementia tour to One Hundred Oaks on Wednesday, June 17th from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Vanderbilt Family Resource Center’s Caregiver Support group will be held on May 13, 2015 from 12 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. in Medical Center East Room 8349. The caregiver support group is a time to share information and openly discuss your problems without judgment, to process your feelings, and to hear others talk about their experiences.

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FREE Legal Advice on Estate Planning
Friday, May 15th from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. in Light Hall Room 437. This is a first-come, first served event. Each consultation will be approximately 30 minutes. Plan to arrive no later than 1:30 p.m. (more information is located on page 1).