

ELDER CARE UPDATES



**Winter
2004**

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*I Pledge Allegiance to The
Flag... With Liberty and Justice
and*

DIGNITY FOR ALL

by Karen Witkowicz

I was thinking about the discourse on whether the wording of the Pledge should be changed. One welcome addition to the Pledge for me would be the word "dignity". I have had over the last few months, occasions to witness our indifference to our seniors. We see this in hospitals, nursing homes and other alternative living situations for our seniors.

Some synonyms for dignity are: decency, grace, honor, merit, regard and virtue. All of these terms are positive ones sometimes difficult for us to see in some of the seniors we work with. We all have so much to do during the day, both at home and work, it is easy to rush through our work focused on the next thing to do. How much better it would be if we looked our client in the eye when we spoke to him or said hello and asked how his day was. How much better it would be if we acknowledged our seniors pain and sense of loss with a listening ear. A few minutes with a staff person is all the personal interaction some people get all day. It also helps to remember that our seniors had very active, busy lives filled with accomplishments that need to be celebrated.

Sometimes just a smile can work wonders. I remember when I worked in a nursing some years ago, a woman in a wheelchair sat by a certain window each day. When I walked by I said hello and smiled at her. She started



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to recognize me and called me "the pretty girl with the round face". Even though this was the extent of our contact, she looked for me every day. Giving someone "her dignity" is acknowledging, listening, and responding, as we would like to be recognized. It's someone rearranging a hospital gown so it won't gap, providing a push to a tired person in a wheelchair or reassuring a person with memory loss that she is safe.

I, too, am guilty sometimes of rushing past people without really "seeing" them and usually one of my clients will bring me around. As we rush through our busy lives, may we be aware of our senior's dignity and do what we can to preserve it. ☐



*"Excellent care for your loved one
. Peace of mind for you."*

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Memantine Gives New Hope for Alzheimer's Disease

Memantine was recently approved by the FDA for the treatment of moderate to severe cases of Alzheimer's disease. The drug will be available in America in early 2004. This is the first drug prescribed to patients with severe cases of Alzheimer's. The four previous drugs made were all intended for only mild to moderate Alzheimer's. So far memantine has been remarkably free of side effects.

Memantine works differently than any of the other previously approved drugs for the treatment of Alzheimer's. Memantine blocks overstimulation of brain cells involved in learning and memory. This overexcitation, produced by a chemical called glutamate, appears to exhaust the cells and leads to damage and cell death. Memantine blocks some of the glutamate. Imbalances in glutamate levels have been identified as a factor related to memory problems in Alzheimer's.

In trials memantine was paired with cholinesterase, another Alzheimer drug, which works by boosting acetylcholine, a chemical that is deficient in the Alzheimer's patient's brain. Patient functioning was improved in the areas of temperament and cognition. Treatment also appeared to slow the decline of day-to-day functioning. □

Don't Miss...

The Forgetting: A Portrait of Alzheimer's

This 90-minute PBS documentary on Alzheimer's Disease will air on January 21. The prime-time national broadcast, based on David Shenk's critically-acclaimed book, will weave together portrayals of families with the science of this awesome disease, its imprint on human history and the current race to find a cure.

Resources For Caregivers

Books:

"The Complete Idiot's Guide to Long Term Care Planning" by Marilee Driscoll.

This book gives you a step-by-step planning guide along with many tips and ideas. Good for caregivers who have no idea where to start in the process.

Videos:

"Respite Care" - Delivers urgently-needed information about the need for respite care -- and where to find it.

"Voices from the Trenches" - The foot soldiers of caregiving tell it like it is in this frank and revealing video.

"Separated by Distance" - Nearly 7 million Americans are long-distance caregivers. This dramatic video can help each of them


"In Sickness & In Health" - Caring for a seriously ill spouse brings new meaning to the wedding vow

Videos are suitable for individuals or organizations and are available for purchase at :

<http://atsh.org/books/index.html>


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