



The MASE Monthly Newsletter

July 2016

Winners of Queen's Award for Voluntary Service



The month of July



Well what a disappointing month June turned out to be! Wet and windy, with short, sharp bursts of sunshine. Let's hope that July brings the sunshine we are all waiting for.

The flower for July is the Water Lily or Larkspur

July's birthstone is the ruby, which is said to symbolise contentment.

In all parts of the UK July is on average the warmest month of the year



Tips for Carers keeping on top of difficult feelings

Caring for a person with dementia can feel like a series of small losses. Each time a loss occurs, you have to make another adjustment, and carry on. To survive the caring process, you need to look after yourself and not judge yourself too harshly. Remember it takes **STRENGTH** to be **GENTLE AND KIND**.

Tackle your guilt – If you are feeling guilty, try to work out why. You will then be able to make clearer decisions about what is right both for you and for the person with dementia.

Talk things through – Suppressing pent-up emotions can be damaging. One of the most important steps you can take is to talk about your feelings – whether to an understanding professional, a good friend, a Counsellor or anonymously, to someone on a helpline i.e. The Alzheimer's Society Dementia Helpline 0300 222 1122. Please don't forget we are lucky to have Helen McDonough with us at each Group, who is a trained Counsellor and who will always be happy to give you some time at the Groups.

Take a break – You will be better able to face the challenge of caring if you take enough breaks away from the person and find time for yourself. Try to find time to reflect and relax, to pursue interests and hobbies, and to socialise with friends and family.

Be kind to yourself - Please try not to beat yourself up about sometimes being a bit grumpy, you are entitled to feel down occasionally. You are on a very difficult journey and your world has probably be turned upside down, so laugh whenever you can, let the tears flow when they need to, then brush yourself off and start all over again!

Forward thinking... ..



Recently some of our Carers have used the services of North Staffordshire Hospital in Stoke. It soon became abundantly clear, particularly in the A & E Department, that although the nursing staff say they know about Dementia, in point of fact they do not! It is no good hearing someone say 'oh my Nan and Grandpa had Dementia so I know all about the illness' - knowing about someone who had the illness and dealing with someone who has dementia, are very different. At the time of being treated in hospital your loved one is in a strange environment and is probably very frightened and fractious, so their behaviour may become challenging and aggressive. As

their Carer, no-one will understand your loved one better than you. So do make sure your voice is heard and do not be fobbed off by staff, who keep telling you they are busy. Common courtesy and communication costs little, and can in the end save a great deal of frustration.

Another piece of advice is to **ALWAYS** keep a small bag of essential items packed at home in case of an emergency. Should your loved one have to be taken to Hospital in an emergency, be it Stafford or Stoke, you will at least be prepared and will be self-sufficient without having to keep asking the staff for things. In the bag make sure you have items that can occupy your loved one whilst waiting to be seen. Keep in the bag a **pack of biscuits, fruit pastilles, or boiled sweets, wet wipes, tissues, reading material** and finally a **small bottle of water**.



In all honesty, when you are waiting for hours at any hospital, these items may just save you from crawling up the wall and could help you in some small way to remain calm, without having to constantly ask for items from the nursing staff.

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Alzheimer's Society Dementia Helpline 0300 222 1122 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday and Saturday and Sunday 10am - 4pm.

Is it time to take away the car keys?



At some time you will feel concern or even fear that your cared for should no longer drive a vehicle. This is one of the most important deliberations, considerations and possible actions you will probably face as a Carer.

A person's age is not and should not be the reason for taking away the car keys. There are people in their 80s and 90s who hold licenses and drive actively and safely, while there are others in their 50s and 60s who are dangers to themselves and others when behind the wheel. Physical and mental condition and ability are the first factors to consider.

Vision: Conditions such as cataracts, macular degeneration, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy can hamper driving ability. Your loved one's optometrist or ophthalmologist can identify vision problems, limitations, concerns and cautions. It is possible that some limitation in vision can be accommodated by not driving at dusk or night. Some conditions, such as cataracts and glaucoma, can be corrected surgically. If your cared for wears glasses, schedule an annual eye and vision examination.

Physical ability: Driving takes dexterity, ability and strength in both arms and legs/feet to control the vehicle at all times. Consider any physical limitations. Consider, too, if he or she has shrunk a bit in physical size, where the solution may be to move the driver's seat forward and upward for both better control and vision over the bonnet of the car, and/or adding a pillow.

Physical activity: Mature adult drivers die in auto accidents at a rate higher than other age bracket because, at home, many do little or no exercise, not even a daily walk outside. Therefore, if your cared for currently does no physical activity to maintain or build strength, agility and aerobic ability, this should be a concern. Importantly, it is probably correctable by introducing him or her to less television time and more physical activity.

Diseases: Patients with Alzheimer's disease can become disoriented almost anywhere and a severe diabetic may fall into a coma. The parent's physician can advise of such possible problems and risks. But, don't assume that your parent has Alzheimer's if he or she forgets momentarily the location of a wallet, purse or newspaper.

Medications: Prescription drugs are chemicals designed to produce specific and desired changes or functions within the body. But, as in the law of physics, for every action there is a reaction. That reaction may be drowsiness and/or a slowing of the person's reaction time. In the field of medicine these are identified as side effects and may effect, even seriously, a person's ability to drive.

Here are some hints for determining your cared for's ability to drive:

Ride along with them: Take a ride and observe his or her physical ability in controlling the vehicle, staying within the lane, how turns are handled, the driving speed, ability to scan from left to right, any visual susceptibility to glare, and for any possible confusion in traffic. Do your observations simply, without nagging or distraction.

Check the vehicle: Periodically and *without fanfare*, check the outside of the car for any possible dents or scrapes.

Here is why you should not jump to a decision or conclusion that your cared for should no longer drive.

Taking the car keys removes their independence, the ability to drive to meet friends for coffee, to church, the library or to visit friends. The experience can be traumatic.

As the Carer, you may also have to deal with other relatives who may be too quickly judgmental and even emphatic that the keys must be taken. Involve your cared for in the consideration and decision. You may find a positive reaction when talking candidly with them, and they will understand your care and concern for their safety. If you feel that it is time for them to hand over the keys, recognise that you may run into resistance.

This is understandable. However, if that is the case, there are several ways to legally revoke your loved one's license. You just have to find a tactful, loving way to approach this topic.

If you have a computer please take a look at our website which covers all MASE activities: www.themasegroup.com

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