

**Institute for Disability Studies**  
**ShareCare Notes: Dealing with Apathy**  
**June 16, 2006**

**Inside this issue:**

- 1) The 36-Hour Day
- 2) Apathy is Common in Many Dementing Conditions
- 3) Creativity
- 4) Apathy and Suggestions for Coping
- 5) Current Events

**1) The 36-Hour Day**

Many caregivers know the feeling of having a 36-hour day, but Nancy Mace and Peter Rabins took this concept and wrote a family guide for caregivers of people with memory losses and dementing illnesses. This book has helped many families understand memory loss illnesses and how to better care for their loved one. In this population, apathy and loss of motivation are a common occurrence. Mace and Rabins say that it is important to get these people up and moving, but just ask them to do a little at a time. "If she stops a task after a few minutes, instead of urging her to go on, focus your attention on what she has accomplished and compliment her on that." But caregivers must be careful not to try to push for too much too fast. If a person has withdrawn, it may be because they are overwhelmed and feel that they will not be able to perform adequately in certain situations. If these people are unduly pushed, they may become upset and agitated. This great little book has been around for a while and provides current medical research along with Web sites to connect you with the most recent findings on dealing with memory loss and dementing illnesses: Mace, N. L., & Rabins, P. V. (1999). *The 36-hour day*. New York, Warner Books, Inc.

**2) Apathy is Common in Many Dementing Conditions**

Apathy is a debilitating and under recognized syndrome that affects the vast majority of individuals with dementia. It results in functional impairment and causes stress among caregivers. Apathy is common in other dementing illnesses as well (e.g., Parkinson's disease, vascular dementia) and may even occur in a substantial number of patients with mild cognitive impairment (Ready et al., 2003). Accurate discrimination of the symptoms of apathy from depression is necessary for optimal treatment. Researchers recently completed a study looking at the a caregiver-based behavioral training program for reducing apathy in patients with Alzheimer's disease (AD) and reducing stress among their caregivers. Preliminary findings suggest that behavioral intervention [plus certain medications] benefited persons with AD and their caregivers (Boyle et al., 2004). To read more about diagnosis and treatment visit

<http://www.psychiatrictimes.com/showArticle.jhtml?articleId=174402660>

### 3) Creativity

This article by Bradley Fisher talks about creativity and how it can keep people more alert and happy as they age, but it can be applied to people of all ages. Fisher says that successful aging (or staying motivated and happy at any age) "involves an ability to cope with present circumstance by drawing on past experience and maintaining a positive sense of future." This is where creativity is helpful. Creativity expands a person's thinking skills and allows them to see other options and solutions to problems. Being creative allows the person to have a sense of self-accomplishment and gives him or her something to look forward to. One of the people interviewed for this research said, "Having a goal to strive for gives you a sense of purpose and reaching that goal gives a sense of accomplishment." Another respondent said, "When a person is creative, he opens up doors and it's important he expands, and creativity is the means for that expanding. While you are creating you are taking your mind and building a wall between you and the undesirable things in your life." To find this article, visit

<http://lynx.lib.usm.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.epnet.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&an=2624124>

If you have difficulty with this link, carefully copy and paste it into your browser.

### 4) Apathy and Suggestions for Coping

In a Pick's disease support group booklet, Dr. Liz Sammpson gave some suggestions on what to do to help alleviate apathy. She said to first rule out depression. You need to make sure that the apathy is not caused by depression which could be treated medically. Secondly, she says that "there are no studies about the best way to manage apathy; most ideas have come from caregivers themselves." Some of these suggestions include establishing a routine walk or trip out of the house, adding books and activities which the person used to enjoy to their environment, using activities which play upon repetition, such as word search puzzles and Jigsaws, which match his or her mental capacity. Sammpson also says to break tasks down into smaller manageable chunks and to try to remain positive.

Sammpson reports "every night, Ronald Reagan's security guards sprinkled a bag of dead leaves on the swimming pool so that when he walked out the next morning he could rake the water; a job the former president enjoyed and still obtained a sense of achievement from. The security guard then put the leaves back in a bag, ready to throw on the pool again in the evening!"

Little activities such as these can have a major impact on apathy. Look for bright spots in your loved one's day and capitalize on it! For more on this article, visit <http://www.pdsg.org.uk/Booklet/apa.htm>.

## 5) Current Events

Tuesday, June 20 - A lecture titled "Taking the Keys Away from Someone with Memory Loss and Safe Return" will be held from 10 a.m.-12 p.m. at the Institute for Wellness at Wesley Medical Center. Lunch will be provided, so please call 601.545.5614 no later than June 19 to reserve your spot!

Thursday, June 22 - An all member ShareCare Bank potluck supper will be held at Westminster Presbyterian Church at 6 p.m. The theme is Italian, so if you are a member or just interested, bring your favorite Italian dish and a friend!

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### A note from Project ShareCare:

The staff at Project ShareCare selects books, articles and news stories to share with you from the news wires, scientific/medical journals and other selected media. We aim to provide you with relevant and timely information to help you in your role as a caregiver. The articles we share with you are not necessarily the opinion expressed by Project ShareCare. We strongly encourage you to please read the original articles and form your own opinions.

Project ShareCare Bank, funded by the Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities, is a community building project that provides networking and neighborly services for families who have an adult member with a disability or chronic condition.

ShareCare is sponsored by the Institute for Disability Studies (IDS), Mississippi's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD). IDS provides university training, community service activities, research, and information that promote the independence, productivity, and community inclusion of individuals with disabilities and their families.

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