

Institute for Disability Studies
ShareCare Notes
Welcome to Summer! Dealing with Apathy, Part II
July 14, 2006

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Two weeks ago, we started sharing with you information we have learned about apathy, motivation and depression. Since this topic is such a big part of the world of people with varying conditions and their caregivers, this second ShareCare Notes brings you more resources.

1. Apathy and Treatment

Apathy has been defined as "an absence or suppression of emotion, feeling, concern or passion. Further, apathy is an indifference to things generally found to be exciting or moving." According to Paul Malloy and Patricia Boyle, apathy affects up to 70% of patients who are in a mild to moderate stage of Alzheimer's disease and is common in patients with Parkinson's disease, vascular dementia and mild cognitive impairments. Apathy shares many overlapping features with depression, but whereas apathy is primarily characterized by motivational loss, depression is characterized primarily by mood disturbances. According to this article and our clinical resources, apathy is often associated with injury to the right hemisphere frontal lobe of the brain. Injury and disease can cause apathy because of neuropathological changes. Malloy and Boyle outline several treatments for apathy. Combining pharmacological and behavioral treatments has been shown to be more effective than prescriptions alone. Studies in which patients were given prescriptions and behavioral interventions have "resulted in improved patient health and lower caregiver burden." To read this article in its entirety, please visit

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

A new article in Neurology (7/11/2006) confirms our previous remarks about the importance of differentiating apathy from depression.

http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory_35846.html

To see more about apathy and traumatic brain injury, also visit

<http://www.psychologyandlaw.com/TBI.htm>.

2. Apathy Assessment Tools

Malloy and Boyle also report on several assessments which can be given when apathy is suspected. Commonly used measures include the Neuropsychiatric Inventory; the Frontal System Behavior Scale; and the very short, widely used, Apathy Evaluation Scale, which can be filled out by the physician or family member. The author of this test identifies three domains of apathy: "deficits in goal-directed behavior, a decrement in goal-related thought content, and emotional indifference with flat affect." The test was developed for people with strokes, but has since been used for people with Alzheimer's disease, depression and traumatic brain injury. If you would like more information or to read a copy of this assessment, visit the Web site listed below. If you suspect your loved one is in need of an evaluation, please discuss your concerns with a trusted physician.

<http://www.tbims.org/combi/aes/index.html>

3. Coping Skills for Apathy

In a professional article from the Huntington's Disease Support Information Site, authors discuss how apathy can be very challenging to caregivers. Families are urged to encourage and accommodate their apathetic loved ones. If someone else helps the person to initiate an activity, he or she is much more likely to continue the activity. Several coping strategies are given in this article including:

- Use calendars, schedules and routines to keep the person busy.
- Do not interpret lack of activity as "laziness."
- Patients may not be able to initiate activities, but may participate if encouraged by others.
- Gently guide behaviors, but accept "no"

For more on this article, please see

<http://endoflifecare.tripod.com/juvenilehuntingtonsdisease/id97.html>.

4. Words of Wisdom

You may find many "words of wisdom" from other caregivers about how to deal with day to day challenges, including apathy. If you are interested in joining an online support group, here are a few to consider. You may choose one or more and subscribe at

<http://listserv.tbinet.org/archives/index.html>.

5. NEW Caregiver Support Group

On July 19, 2006, we will begin a new support group series on Powerful Tools for Caregivers. This is an excellent six-session course designed to help caregivers take care of themselves in order to be better caregivers to their loved ones. The series includes various topics, such as taking care of you; communication; dealing with transitions; making caregiving decisions; in

home help; depression and much more. This will be a closed group once it begins, so if you plan to attend, you must begin at the first session. This is a free service of ShareCare Bank. It is professionally led and will be at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, July 19 at Westminster Presbyterian Church, 115 North 25th Avenue in Hattiesburg (behind Taco Bell). For more information, call Christy Harrison at 601.266.5163. Hope to see you there!

6. Just for Fun

Get all the buzz on bug bites. This recent article offers great tips.

http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory_35818.html

A note from Project ShareCare: The staff at Project ShareCare select 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. For more information about IDS, visit the Institute's Web site at <http://www.usm.edu/ids> or call 1-888-671-0051 (TTY). To make a tax-deductible gift to IDS for this and other projects, visit <http://www.usm.edu/ids/supportus.html>.

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