

Book reviews

The nursing home and you

Partners in caring for a relative with Alzheimer's disease

The nursing home and you: Partners in caring for a relative with Alzheimer's disease; by Edna L. Blevins, Lauren J. Darnell, Connie C. Bonebrake. Published by: The American Association of Homes for the Aging, Washington D.C., 1988, non member \$5.00, member \$4.00 (\$1.65 postage and handling,) 32 pp.

This small book is designed as a guide for family members who have, or expect to have, a relative in a nursing home. It is written in a warm personal style by authors who are obviously knowledgeable about their subject matter. While the material they present is not new, it is offered in an abbreviated and readable format that will be appealing to persons who have little time for reading, but are in search of answers.

The first two chapters attempt to prepare family members for the impact the nursing home placement may have on them and on their relatives with Alzheimer's disease. Through the use of vignettes, they illustrate possible reactions family members may have to their new role and their perceived loss of control.

Chapter three on the nursing home environment and how it can work for the concerned family member, offers suggestions to help him or her become an effective participant in care. The authors recommend that the family member who is interested should attend multidisciplinary care planning meetings, and if the nursing home permits, to share knowledge about and keep abreast of medical concerns related to their relative. In the same chapter the

authors acknowledge that there are occasions when families feel a need to confront staff about how a relative is being cared for, and they illustrate both effective and ineffective ways to approach staff.

The chapter written especially for spouses gives several interesting examples of how a wife or a husband may attempt to cope with the loneliness that results from being unable to communicate with a spouse. The authors also discuss the lack of privacy that exists in nursing homes that prevents couples from expressing their love and affection. Sensitive to the needs of some couples, they suggest ways to achieve privacy even in a nursing home setting.

Chapter eight is about the nursing home as the family member's partner in care. It briefly mentions that the nursing home is in a no-win situation in its attempt to serve the many physically and mentally impaired persons in a group living situation. This chapter, like chapter three, could have offered much greater help if it had been expanded to cover more of the problems families face in learning about and understanding the nursing home environment.

The chapters on financial assistance and legal considerations are very helpful. They discuss possible though limited sources of funding for those requiring nursing home care. Legal issues that families need to consider in protecting their rights and those of impaired relatives are also considered here.

The Nursing Home and You offers a brief but helpful guide as an introductory resource to families who are trying to cope with placing a relative in a nursing home.

Reviewed by Dorothy H. Coons, Director of Alzheimer's Projects, The University of Michigan, Co Editor of *A Better Life*, Consultant in Gerontology, Ann Arbor, Michigan

Design for Dementia

Planning environments for the elderly and the confused

Margaret P. Calkins, M. Arch
National Health Publishing,
Owings Mills, Maryland, 1988

Design for Dementia is full of well researched ideas supporting Maggie Calkin's philosophy regarding the use of physical environment as a therapeutic tool in Alzheimer's care. "There is evidence indicating that special attention to the physical and social environments of the cognitive impaired older person can maintain and/or increase their functional capacity, self respect, and dignity."

Ms. Calkins transcends philosophy and gives us (complete with visuals) practical suggestions for changing the environment to maximize the AD victims functional level in both the home and in long term care settings.

Design for Dementia is set up in an easily readable format of "behavioral consideration" and "design response".

The only infraction is the many photos with glaring tiled floors that seem to be antithetical to Ms. Calkins empirical data. This is a minor objection in a book full of wonderful ideas and information. I was especially grateful for the multiple principles that can be readily adapted in the home, and for the author's willingness to pursue alternative pathways as more studies develop.

Reviewed by Joanne Koenig Coste.

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