VISITING VIGNETTES

A monthly newsletter to all Mended Hearts members.

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Mended Hearts National Visiting Chair

The Theme for National Family Caregivers Month November 2018 is Supercharge Your Caregiving! Caregivers are superheroes. They successfully do all of the following:

- Managing medications.
- Getting to doctor appointments.
- Balancing work and home.

Thank you to all of the superhero caregivers who work around the clock to keep us heart healthy doing all of the things it takes to ensure that we enjoy a better life.

The focus of this Visiting Vignettes is to provide tips for accredited visitors when they visit caregivers and most importantly provide tips for the caregiver.

Mended Hearts visiting protocol provides opportunities for caregivers to visit family members of the heart patient. Caregivers may visit family members provided the caregiver has completed the accredited visitor training and is accompanied by an accredited visitor who is a heart patient. A caregiver may be a spouse of a patient, family member, partner of patient or a person responsible for the patient.

An accredited visitor may meet the caregiver while visiting with the patient in his room or while visiting with the family in the surgery or cath lab waiting room. The caregiver is a major factor in the recovery, whether that patient has had heart surgery, heart attack or cardiac disease.

LISTEN CAREFULLY!
Express your interest in the patient’s well-being and inquire about his or her concerns. Remember that each patient is unique; so is the caregiver. The caregiver is usually frightened by the responsibility of caring for a heart patient. As an accredited visitor who has heart disease, you can draw on your experience and discuss the concerns your caregiver had in caring for you as you answer the caregiver’s questions.

For accredited visitor teams consisting of the caregiver and the accredited visitor of Mended Hearts, both have knowledge of all of the concerns you had, so that you can easily share the following tips with the new caregiver.
1. Encourage the caregiver to speak with the hospital dietitian in charge of the patient's diet if there are questions about diet or specific foods.

2. Encourage the caregiver to speak with the doctor about the patient's physical abilities and recommended exercise program if they have questions about physical abilities.

3. Encourage the caregiver to visit the doctor with the patient. A list of questions for the doctor is always helpful.

4. Recommend the caregiver call the patient's doctor for advice on any questions about the patient's welfare. The doctor is working FOR the patient and wants to be kept informed of any possible problems.

How can family caregivers, including those who are not accredited visitors handle it all? Even superheroes need tools! Thankfully, new caregiving tools can help lighten the load.

**Unlock the Power of Medical Records**
Information is power, and caregiver access to online patient medical records is getting easier and more powerful every day. With online patient portals you can get your loved one's health and insurance information how and when you need it. Join the millions of family caregivers who have already accessed their loved one's online medical records to improve care.

**Master the Medications**
One of your most important daily responsibilities as a caregiver is managing medications - making sure they are taken properly and on time, getting refills, and watching for side effects. Your loved one may have more than one illness and have to take several medications. Tech tools are an easy, safe way to track your loved one's meds and make caregiving a bit less stressful.

**Unleash the Power of Apps**
Caregiving is overwhelming and you simply can't do it all by yourself. Luckily, there are many apps and tools that can help caregivers do almost anything from A to Z such as checking your loved one's vital signs, locating them with GPS if they wander off, getting healthy eating plans at the touch of a button or connecting with caregiver support groups and online communities. Use apps to streamline your tasks so you can get a break and take a few minutes to recharge your own batteries.

Not all superheroes wear capes. You are rising to the demands and challenges of the caregiver role every day. Take advantage of tools that can help you stay on top of it all and help you restore some balance to your life.

When you are caring for a loved one, whether in the hospital or at home, caring for yourself is often your last priority. However, it is important to create a balance between caring for others and yourself. You may not feel that caring for yourself is a priority, but it is imperative that you try. The best gift you can give your loved one is to also care for yourself.

- Get enough sleep
- Exercise regularly
- Eat well-balanced meals
- Ask for help
- Join a support group

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We are thankful for our Mended Hearts Accredited Visitors who continue to provide hope and encouragement to heart patients and their families. We are also grateful for our caregivers who make our lives easier every day.

Heartfelt Regards,

Dr. Fredonia B. Williams
National Visiting Chair
Southern Assistant Regional Director

Future Questions/Topics

We want to hear from you!
Other challenging questions for this newsletter may be emailed to fredoniabw@att.net.

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