

Grant provides aid for medication management

by Elane Daly

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These days we all have to deal with taking medications and even more medications when we have a variety of doctors. Knowing what the medications are for, how and when to take them and how they interact with each other is a lot to understand and more importantly to manage or even try to manage them for someone else. This can be a huge dilemma, especially for the frail elderly and for all the different health care providers involved in their care.

The Community Health Foundation of western and central New York has provided grants to eight teams from Buffalo, Ithaca, Syracuse, Utica and Auburn to work together in a Quality Improvement Collaborative to improve palliative care or transitions of care for frail elders in our communities.

Our County Health Department's Home Care Agency along with the Cayuga County Nursing Home and Hospice of the Finger Lakes have teamed up as the Cayuga County Geriatric Advocacy Project to educate patients and the community on the importance of taking an active participation in their own health care, starting with the responsibility of managing their medications.

The local team has created a Universal Medication Form to keep an accurate and current list of all medications, prescribed and over the counter, together in one place. This Universal Medication Form can be used to improve communication between all health care providers such as your primary physician, specialty physicians, emergency service personnel, hospital staff, nursing home staff, hospice or home care staff. It can also help your family or Health Care Proxy Agent when making health care decisions for you. Just think how much easier one list of medications would be instead of having to go through a shoebox full of medications.

Medication reconciliation is very important whenever someone encounters a change in his or her condition or whenever a person moves in and out of the health care system. An accurate and current medication list will help to reduce duplication and errors. The local collaborative team of nurses have found the list to be useful by documenting the changes in medications over time and streamlining the medications prescribed by all the patient's doctors. Physicians have found the Universal Medication Form has helped to treat a patient more effectively by seeing what other physicians have ordered for the same patient thus avoiding duplication. Pharmacists have found that they could review a current list of medications and avoid any adverse drug reactions. EMTs and Emergency Room staff have found it quicker to access the information during the emergency call. Patients and families have admitted that the Universal Medication Form keeps them involved with their care, and they feel more control over their health care.

In addition to the Universal Medication Form, the collaborative has developed a plastic Health File, which is a plastic envelope with a tie closure that holds important documents such as the medication form, but also the Health Care Proxy, Do Not Resuscitate form, Medical History form and emergency contact information. This Health File is magnetized for your refrigerator and ready to access when the ambulance arrives, when you go to the doctor's office or if you enter another level of health care.

So many times we let medical professionals be responsible for our medications. But, in reality, we are responsible. We need to know about them and how to manage them effectively. Or you could be the one who manages medications for a loved one. Take this responsibility and get organized. Take control of your medications and health information.

The local collaborative has provided information to our local and surrounding hospitals, physicians, pharmacists, emergency services, nursing homes, hospices and certified home health agencies in order to make everyone aware of the Universal Medication Form and Health File and to look for it when a patient transitions between the different layers of health care.

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Universal Medication Form

€You will receive the Universal Medication Form and Health File if you are a patient of the Cayuga County Home Care Agency, Hospice of the Finger Lakes and upon discharge from the Cayuga County Nursing Home

€For those who would like the form or plastic Health File, contact

The Office of Aging at 253-1226 or the Long Term Care Access Office at 253-1100

€For more information, contact the Health Department at 253-1301, the Cayuga County Nursing Home at 253-7346, or Hospice of the Finger Lakes at 255-2733

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