



# TO YOUR HEALTH



Carleton-Willard Village Out-Patient Clinic - 100 Old Billerica Rd., Bedford, MA 01730

Volume 21, Number 11



November 2016

## THE DILEMMA OF ACCEPTING HELP

by Barbara Chenoweth, NP

If only we had the ability or wisdom to foresee the future. Could we have predicted a fall? Could we have prevented it? It is a striking fact that many older people resist making changes in their lives that could reduce their risk of injury and loss of independence. Since independence is highly valued by most of us and is an ingrained value in our culture, why are actions and changes to protect independence so often rejected?

For example, between 2002 and 2012 there were 200,000 deaths from falls, a 50% increase in a decade. There were 24,000 deaths in 2012 alone, (Katie Hafner, "Bracing for the Falls of the Aging Nation," *New York Times*, Nov. 2014). Recognizing this risk, efforts have been made to educate people, to make homes and outdoors safer, and to promote classes in balance and exercise. While these measures are important, individuals continue to turn down recommendations for canes or walkers, refuse to wear emergency call devices or to move to safer homes.



Most of us know of one or more people who were found lying on the floor of their home for hours, even days, after a fall, with their emergency call button hanging in the closet instead of around their neck. Many of these falls cause disability, pain and result in loss of independence.

And, in-deed, most people know the facts:

- Steps and stairways are hazards
- Tripping over cords, carpet edges, even pets, are common causes of falls
- Reaching out for things without a secure base of support leads to falls
- Bending over without support or without empty hands is dangerous
- Not paying attention, moving too quickly are risky
- The risk of falling increases after the age of 80

Since we know these facts, what stops us from using this knowledge? Naturally, many writers, including gerontologists, speculate on the psychological and societal dynamics that might interfere. Susan Jacoby wrote in *Never Say Die: the Myth and Marketing of the New Old Age*, 2011, that our societal emphasis on "forever young" prevents us from accepting the various changes that accompany our aging.

In 2014, Larry Jacobson observed that we vary in our ability to accept and adapt to changes as we age. He characterized our dilemma as a conflict between wanting autonomy and accepting dependency. In "Denial is Not a River in Egypt: from Old Mind to New," he proposed that denial can be a helpful protection until it becomes an unrealistic, defensive mindset.



**Because the changes that occur as we age can be subtle, we are often unaware that our balance has changed or our vision has gradually grown less clear, or our reaction time has slowed enough to compromise our driving. Fortunately, many of us are aware, and this awareness can help us to seek out ways to compensate for our changes. For example, if we recognize that we cannot talk and drive at the same time, we can tell our passengers to hold the conversation until we arrive at our destination. If we notice that our balance is causing near-falls, we can consult our primary care provider and discuss a referral to Physical Therapy or review our medicine list for any contributing medication.**

**Changes that require using a walker or cane can be difficult to accept. It is not unusual for a person to resist the recommendation. The challenge of adapting to change can be less onerous when one sees the benefit: the paradox is that one can become more independent by accepting help. Help comes in many forms. Help could be a cane, a hearing aid, a companion, a driver, or a move to a safer, more supportive home.**

**Accepting help might mean letting go of certain ideas about who we think we are. Some of us were accustomed to telling others what to do, not the other way around. Some of us may believe that accepting help is a sign of weakness. Those of us who were the "helpers" often have trouble being the one who is helped. Looking inside ourselves, becoming more aware can open the possibility of seeing our changes in a new, more positive light.**

**Cultivating acceptance, letting go of the "old" view of ourselves can be a liberating experience. In the end, none of us are truly independent, but all of us are interdependent, capable of adapting and changing throughout our lives.**

### **BEDFORD DRUG PICK-UP**

The Bedford Police will pick-up expired and unused medications on:

Friday, November 11, 2016

You can drop off any unused/expired  
Prescription ONLY  
medication at the Clinic between  
8:30 am and 12 noon.

*The Clinic can only accept medications during these times and on the date of pick-up.*

### **Health Education Lecture**

Jonathon O'Dell from the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing will present:

**"How to be Heard:  
Letting Staff Know How They Can  
Meet Your Needs"**

Friday, November 11  
in Auditorium Center  
10:30 am — 11:30 am



Happy  
Thanksgiving