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## CARE CORP'S OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST: Helping You Maintain Your Independence at Home

deaths and the most common cause of hospitalization related to trauma.

In 2001, almost 400 thousand people were hospitalized following falls, Bolden, cites statistics from the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.

Statistics also suggest that folks 75 years of age and older who fall are four to five times more likely to move into a long-term

care facility.

Occupational therapists work to change statistics like these by providing treatment to be safe and function in the home to remain as independent as possible for as long as possible. To prepare for the job, occupational therapists are required to have at least a bachelor's degree, which includes a minimum of six months of internships, a certification exam and licensure by the state of Ohio.

"As an occupational therapist going into the home, I'm looking at the whole picture," Bolden says, who earned her degree in occupational therapy at Ohio State University. An OT takes into account a

patient's mental and physical condition, assistance that is available to the person, the environment, and so on.

"I go room by room and through my patients' daily routines to see if they can get out of bed and into their clothing, use the bathroom and the kitchen," she says. This is an excellent way to understand and alleviate the challenges a person is facing. For example, a patient who may have done well with a walker in the hospital - where hallways are wide, open and smooth - may find difficulty at home, where walkways can be narrow and cluttered.

Very few homes are as accommodating as a rehabilitation clinic. Making the transition to home easier and safe are Bolden's main concerns.

There are many ways to achieve these goals.

Walkers and wheelchairs are demanding on the upper body, so patients often need to work on upper body strength and coordination through a simple home-exercise program. Changes to surroundings also help.

"We can modify the environment to keep people as functional as possible for as long as possible. It can be as simple as rearranging things and clearing areas or as complex as putting in ramps, grab bars or a modified bathroom. A well-placed grab bar can save a person a lot of suffering and thousands of dollars in medical expenses," Bolden insists.

One of the most complicated tasks is making meals. Bolden recommends many patients avoid using the stove and make good use of a microwave, placed on the table so there's no need to carry a plate of hot food.

Another way to make life easier for those whose balance is compromised is to put things they need on a daily basis at shoulder to hip level. For example, keep shoes on a chair so there's no need to bend over a walker. Try to keep commonly needed items in the "triangle of efficiency," the area between your elbows and your nose. Another tip is to try to live on a single level — for example, move the laundry room upstairs. Also be sure to get some expert advice on what kind of equipment

**Many senior citizens are walking a tightrope.**

They're getting along fine at home, but an unfortunate event, such as a fall, threatens to be a life-changing incident. That's where occupational therapy comes in.

Occupational therapy concerns "everything people do to maintain independence in life: feeding, grooming, dressing, bathing, meal preparation, mobility around the home," explains Jane Bolden, occupational therapist at Care Corp. "We try to foresee trouble."

For many people, a fall is the cause of decline, of losing independence. Among older adults, falls are the leading cause of injury

*"I tell people it's my job to worry about you."*

would be useful, such as grab bars, toilet railings and tub benches.

“OT is not a fix-all for everybody, but often it makes life more bearable and takes some stress out of the situation,” Bolden says. “Most caregivers want to keep their loved ones home if they can find the wherewithal to do it.”

But, it can be tough, especially for the thousands of caregivers looking after loved ones with dementia, explains Bolden, who has a particular interest in working with that group.

More than four million adults in the United States have dementia. As baby boomers age, this number is expected to skyrocket to 13 million.

“OT really helps the caregivers of Alzheimer patients. If you can keep somebody home for a longer period of time, their quality of life is so much better,” Bolden says.

Care Corp.’s staff of 40 Home Health Aides is specially trained to watch for any decline in a patient, adds Debbie Jewell, Home

Health Aide Coordinator at Care Corp. Aides receive safety training annually and attend in-services, one of which is about safety and bath outcomes.

“We train them to observe the patient for safety and report when they feel a patient is in an unsafe situation,” she explains.

“Oftentimes, a Care Corp Home Health Aide is the first person to notice a change, so we rely on them to report that so we can get a therapist in.”

That puts Care Corp’s occupational therapist and Home Health Aides on a joint mission. “I tell people it’s my job to worry about you,” Bolden concludes.

**A well-placed grab bar can save a person a lot of suffering and thousands of dollars in medical expenses.**

## MAKING HOME SAFER FOR OLDER ADULTS

An “ounce of prevention” can go a long way toward preventing falls:

- Remove throw rugs.
- Use only non-skid, rubber-backed bathmats.
- Apply non-skid strips or decals to floor of tub and shower.
- Eliminate thresholds or strips between different flooring materials wherever possible, or clearly mark thresholds with brightly colored tape.
- Remove low-profile furniture such as stools and coffee tables from traffic areas.
- Install rails on both sides of stairs.
- Railings in the hallway between bedroom and bathroom can be very helpful for nighttime use.
- Use grab bars and bathroom safety equipment as recommended by therapist.
- Conveniently placed sturdy chairs allow older people to sit and take a brief rest when standing at bathroom or kitchen sink. Captain-style chairs with arms work best.
- Easy chairs should have sturdy arms, provide soft but firm support, keep thighs parallel to floor, and allow feet to rest flat on floor. A chair that is too soft or too low can be a hazard when trying to move from sit to stand. Seating can be adjusted by adding another cushion as needed, as well as adding a board underneath to provide a more solid base.
- Consider putting bells or some sort of “noisemaker” on pets who tend to be underfoot.

## Loved-Ones Remembered at Holiday Helps Workshop & Memorial Service

Join with others as they remember loved-ones who have passed away by attending the annual Holiday Helps and Memorial Service from noon to 2 p.m. on Saturday, November 12, at Care Corporation, 831 South Street (Rt. 44) in Chardon. Hospice of Care Corp and Burr Funeral Home sponsor this event.

The Holiday Helps program offers tools to help individuals who have experienced a recent death of a friend or family member cope with their grief during the upcoming holidays. Following this program is a Memorial Service. During this time, those in attendance may share personal memories. The event concludes with a candle-lighting ceremony and address by Reverend Ray Mullet.

For more information contact Care Corp at (440) 338-6628, (440) 286-2273, or (440) 632-5991.