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SOCIAL SERVICES CORNER

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ASK THE SOCIAL WORKER: WIDENING DOORWAYS FOR WALKERS

Question: My husband just started using a walker. The good thing about the walker is that he no longer fears he will fall, so he has resumed walking around the house and outside. The only problem is that he bumps his elbows when he passes through one of the doorways in our house. This doorway is narrower than all the other doorways. Do you have any suggestions before we cut a wider doorway?

Answer: I am pleased to hear your husband has realized one of the many benefits of using a walker. Unfortunately, many people limit their activities instead of using a walker to support their activities.

I do have a few suggestions before you begin widening the doorway. Today, most home doorways are 32 inches wide, but the opened door and its hinges reduce the actual opening to 30 inches. I don't know how narrow the doorway is that you mentioned, but assuming the door has standard hinges, it might be possible to inexpensively increase your husband's access to the full width of the doorway by using offset door hinges, also known as swing clear hinges. These Z shaped door hinges can swing the door clearly out of its frame, placing it flush against the wall. These hinges are often used in older commercial buildings to meet the Standards of Accessible Design set by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Perhaps an extra 2 inches will help your husband avoid bumping his elbows when he walks through the doorway. A pair of offset hinges can be purchased

online for less than \$15 at www.allegromedical.com or www.activeforever.com and are usually installed by using the existing screw holes.

If you should need to widen the doorway, you might consider the benefits of discussing the plan with a building contractor who is a Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist (CAPS). This certification indicates the completion of additional training in the needs of older adults and home modifications to allow aging-in-place. The National Association of Home Builders provides a web-based directory, which lists Certified Aging-in-Place Specialists at www.nahb.org.

Although the narrow doorway may be the cause of your husband's problem, I strongly recommend you discuss the situation with his physician. Perhaps his physician will want to order consultations with specialists, such as a physical therapist, an occupational therapist or even an ophthalmologist to rule out other conditions that may be contributing to the problem.

Sources: *The Weekly Insider*. A newsletter published by the Gilbert Guide: www.gilbertguide.com. (November 19, 2008)

JOKE OF THE MONTH

**To err is human, but to really foul things up
you need a computer.**

— Paul Ehrlich,

The Mammoth Book of Zingers, Quips and One-Liners

Laughter is known to boost the immune system, lower blood pressure, burn calories and release pleasure-inducing chemicals in the brain.

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SOCIAL BUTTERFLIES AVOID DEMENTIA, STUDY FINDS

An active social life might be the key to avoiding dementia, a study by Kaiser Permanente Southern California has found. Researchers say that the more socially engaged you are, the lower your risk for the condition. The study followed more than 2,200 women ages 78 and older for four years. The women who had larger social networks were 26 percent less likely to suffer dementia.

While previous studies have pointed to the helpfulness of social engagement, some of the results



have been mixed. For instance, some studies found that being married was helpful, while other studies found it was not. In this study, however, the researchers report that marriage didn't make a difference in the dementia risk; it was the social network that provided the protection.

Those women with at least one daily contact or more had a lower risk for dementia, and it didn't matter whether the interaction was made face-to-face, via telephone or through e-mail.

NEW ADDITIONS TO THE MPPAF'S NATIONAL RESOURCE DIRECTORY

CancerCare: www.cancercare.org, 800-813-Hope (4673)

This national nonprofit organization, founded in 1944, provides free supportive services to anyone affected by cancer: people with cancer, caregivers, children, loved ones and the bereaved. Services include counseling, education, financial assistance and practical advice from trained oncology social workers.

American Pain Foundation: www.painfoundation.org, 888-615-PAIN (7246)

This nonprofit organization was founded in 1977 to improve the quality of life of people with pain by raising public awareness, providing information, promoting research and providing advocacy. Its Web site offers a Pain Resource Locator to help those with pain to find a doctor, caregivers, prescription assistance and other supportive services.

www.cancer.net

This user-friendly Web site is supported by the American Society of Clinical Oncology, a non-profit professional organization that represents physicians who treat people with cancer. The site provides timely, oncologist-approved cancer information to help the public make informed health-care decisions.



QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“Half our life is spent trying to find something to do with the time we have rushed through life trying to save.”

— Will Rogers

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?

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