



**motion picture
pioneers
assistance
fund**

SOCIAL SERVICES CORNER

VOLUME 7, ISSUE 8

AUGUST 2012



ACCOMMODATIONS AND MODIFICATIONS IN THE HOME

Question: My mom wants to stay in her apartment of 25 years but she needs some grab bars installed and is afraid to ask the landlord. Any advice?

Answer: Our advice is to ask nicely and understand her rights.

There are federal and usually state laws pertaining to “fair” housing. “Fair” means free from discrimination. Under the federal Fair Housing Accommodation Act, landlords cannot discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, familial status, national origin, sex or disability. For older folks, it is most often the “disability” that necessitates the accommodation, even though they may not feel they are “disabled.”

A reasonable accommodation is one that allows the tenant to use the property with the same or equal access and enjoyment as the non-disabled tenants. The accommodation must make sense for the disability claimed, must not materially alter the property, and must not be excessively expensive or difficult to maintain. Examples of accommodation for older tenants are grab bars in the shower, a ramp for a wheelchair, and lower kitchen counters. These are

considered “reasonable.” They may also need to be allowed to move to a 2-bedroom apartment if a second bedroom is needed for live-in help, or a second parking spot to accommodate a full-time caregiver.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has offices in every state and major city, as well as national offices in Washington, D.C. HUD counselors receive thousands of calls each year from renters in both public and private housing. They advise also contacting a housing advocate in your community, putting your requests in writing, being specific about your request, and being open to discussion and negotiation.

A final interesting thought: Landlords are forbidden by law from having a blanket policy on reasonable accommodations. Each request must be considered individually. In your mom’s case, grab bars are reasonable, affordable and should be installed at the landlord’s expense as soon as possible.

Source: “Disabled Renter’s Housing Rights”, Nolo, www.nolo.com

JOKE OF THE MONTH

Patient: My right foot hurts.
Doctor: It’s just old age
Patient: But my left foot is just as old.
How come it doesn’t hurt?

—A Joke a Day Keeps the Doctor Away

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

Go Green!

Receive *Social Services Corner* by email.
 Call (888) 994-3863, ext. 2370, or email info@wrmail.org.

Do you or does someone you know need our assistance? Call toll-free (888) 994-3863 or visit www.wrpioneers.org to find out more about our assistance programs.



DRUG UPDATE: What Seniors Should Know About Psychotropic Medication



A “psychotropic medication” is a prescription drug that works on the chemistry of the brain to treat symptoms of mental disorders, such as depression, anxiety and psychosis. With treatment, some of the behavior problems associated with mental disorders can be controlled, and people

who suffer from these disorders can have a higher quality of life than if they didn’t have the medication. Antipsychotics, antidepressants, anti-anxiety drugs and hypnotics (for sleep) are all psychotropic medications.

While helpful and potentially life-changing in younger folks, these drugs can have side effects that are extremely dangerous for older people. For example, sedating drugs, like anti-anxiety and hypnotics can make an older person drowsy, leading to falls. For older people with dementia, psychotropic medications are often used to try to control some of the confused or strange behaviors they exhibit, such as wandering

or asking repetitive questions. Antipsychotic drugs are not FDA approved for the treatment of Alzheimer’s. In fact, they are proven to lead to higher rates of death in nursing home residents.

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) is the federal agency that pays the Medicare coverage for millions of American seniors. CMS has issued an initiative to curb the use of psychotropic drugs in elders with dementia. For one thing, the side effects can lead to further medical problems. Another reason may be financial. Medicare Part D (the prescription drug benefit) spends \$17 billion annually on these drugs, most of which are unnecessary and ineffective.

This update is not intended to serve as medical advice, but rather as consumer awareness. If a doctor wants to prescribe psychotropic medication for you or an elderly loved one, make sure you understand all the risks and benefits (this is called informed consent). Ask what other options can be tried. And make sure any psychotropic drug regimen includes non-drug approaches, such as recreation and supportive counseling (covered by Medicare Part B).

Source: “Mental Health Medication” published by the National Institutes of Mental Health, Bethesda, MD, available for download at www.nimh.nih.gov.

NEW ADDITIONS TO THE MPPAF’S NATIONAL RESOURCE DIRECTORY

CancerCare, www.CancerCare.org, (800) 813-4673

This non-profit organization offers free supportive services, such as counseling, support groups, educational publications and workshops, to anyone affected by cancer. Their professional oncology social workers provide free phone consultations and limited financial aid to low income individuals for cancer-related costs.



QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“Golf is the only game in the world where it takes longer to explain than it does to play.”

—Will Rogers

To view our entire National Resource Directory, please visit www.wrpioneers.org.