

Prescription Roulette

By Judith S. Parnes, L.C.S.W., C.M.C

Forty year-old Patty is the youngest of four children and geographically closest to her parents, with just a few blocks between them. Her parents are frequent baby sitters for her two children, an arrangement that has worked well for everyone involved. Grandma and grandpa love having the kids and the kids love going there.

A few months ago, Patty started noticing her mom wasn't herself. Seventy-five year-old Helen was a retired nurse with a strong personality and a firm independent streak. Suddenly she seemed tired all the time and less focused. She was not interested in going out as much and was forgetful.

At first Patty thought these were just random things, but when her mother snapped at her six year old son for no reason, Patty knew it wasn't her imagination: something was wrong.

Where Do You Start?

It is upsetting to note a change in a parent's behavior. Often this means you have to start acknowledging, maybe for the first time, that your parents are growing older. That can be a hard enough fact to confront. But when your parent also appears to need help, it can be a very challenging situation, for all of you.

Usually the best approach is also the simplest: gently and matter-of-factly express your thoughts over a cup of coffee or lunch. Patty sat down with her mother and told her she was concerned about her because she seemed to not be feeling well. This was neither confrontational nor accusatory. Helen had already indicated she was tired and feeling run down.

If you don't already know, ask your parent if they have been to the doctor recently and what medicines they might have been prescribed. Prescription interactions or unintentional misuse is a common problem, but one that many adult children are unaware of. It is also a situation that can be managed and resolved through team work.

What is in the medicine cabinet?

Patty was dismayed to find over ten pill bottles in the bathroom cabinet. Some were expired. Some were prescribed by different doctors. It even appeared as though some pills from one bottle had been mixed into another.

Talk to your parent about your worries regarding possible adverse effects with prescription medication. You can refer to this article, telling them you just read how medication interactions are a problem for many people of all ages. It is important to keep the tone of your discussion matter-of-fact and not accusatory or angry. You don't want your parent to feel as though they are out of control or 'senile'. But you do want to emphasize how serious it could be and how much you care about them. Ask if you could accompany them to the doctor to sort the medications out. Bring all the bottles to the

office for the doctor to see, so he can identify out-of-date dosages, potential interactions or duplicate prescriptions.

It is always easier for the doctor to take charge of the medications rather than you. This puts the onus on the professional and leaves you in the most appropriate role, that of a loving child.

Pharmacists can also assist in reviewing medications and side effects. However by receiving your parents' permission and contact the physician, the physician can then have your contact information for the future.

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