

GUIDELINES FOR FAMILIES OF OLDER ADULTS DURING THE PANDEMIC

BY AVENIDAS CARE FORUM

To address some of the challenges of the present time, Avenidas of Palo Alto is providing guidelines from our Care Forum experts.

Rita Ghatak, PhD, psychologist, was the CEO of Rose Kleiner's eldercare company Older Adults Care management, after her research at Stanford. As the founder of the aging program at Stanford, and Aging 101, she focuses on caregiver research, family meetings education and care transitions. www.aging101.org.

IMPORTANT TIPS

- 1. Largest number of incoming calls are regarding caregivers that are coming to the home. Protocols about the caregivers maintaining high standards of infection control and following all existing orders are an important concern of family members. It is crucial to be in touch with the caregiver agency to discuss how caregivers are protecting themselves by handwashing, usage of masks and gloves as needed, wiping down surfaces touched, replacing footwear, are significant precursors to good coronavirus management.**
- 2. At a time like this when family members are not able to visit their older adult relatives, it is very important to stay in close touch via smart phones or telephones. Many families have requested caregivers to set up zoom calls and other video chats just so that the older adult is in visual communication with loved ones. If an older adult has health symptoms other than related to COVID19, reach out to the physician for a video health call. Family members can join in.**
- 3. Retirement communities and skilled nursing facilities are seeing a marked rise in stress among residents as well as staff. Most facilities are creating their own support mechanisms along with ongoing staff training for coping with the pandemic. Family members are finding it's experiencing great anguish in not being able to visit their loved ones as well as concerned about health outcomes. It is important to stay in close touch with the facility without placing a burden on staff members. Finding special times to connect as well as requesting staff to do video conferencing or FaceTime to see the face of the resident is an important support tool.**
- 4. Isolation and loneliness are health problems too. Almost every older adult whether they are in their homes or in a facility are experiencing great social isolation. Several entities are trying to increase social support for isolated older adults along with teaching them anxiety and depression management techniques.**

5. Family members are encouraged to have online family meetings to discuss how to support each other during the crisis along with having a crisis plan in case the older adult or one of them falls ill. Important to follow all protocols established in terms of accessing emergency rooms and hospitals.
6. Individuals with dementia that are further isolated during this time need special assistance and management. Daily structure and support is very important. Ongoing efforts to ease anxiety and stress are important but family members need to understand that staff members are trying to balance their own efforts along with the needs of the older adults.
7. Connecting with caregivers at home and facility staff to ensure proper nutrition and provision of good meals is critical.
8. Making sure that as per the facilities or home caregivers' capacity, older adults need to continue physical exercise, music and dance therapy, cognitive exercises, relaxation exercises, reading books and magazines, reducing the time watching grim news on TV and enhancing shows that reflect nature or pets along with music and dancing.
9. Families are encouraged to be aware of local senior centers and their multitude of programs.

CONTACT INFO

Rita Ghatak, PhD

Email: rqhatak@aging101.org

Phone: 650-862-2380

Services available: Help with complex care coordination, family meeting and consults, facilitating care planning discussions, dementia care and support in homes and facilities.