

The Aging Process

When most of us think about aging we think of white haired people, canes, walkers, wheelchairs, declining health, nursing homes, death of friends, death of a spouse and for those with a faith – eternity. It's not always with a positive frame of mind when these thoughts come to us. Yes, aging is a reality of life, but how we approach it and how we care for those who are aging can make a difference between “productive aging” or just getting old.

Once a month I will be writing this column addressing different aspects of aging. I am in no way a medical expert so it is important for you to discuss with your health care professional any questions or concerns you might have regarding the information that is presented. Topics will include such things as: dealing with caregiver guilt; creating a dementia friendly environment; symptoms of dementia; depression in the elderly; the importance of a POA (Power of Attorney), DPAHC (Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care) and POLST (Physician Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment); resources in our community; sexuality with the elderly and in the nursing home; and PMC's philosophy for the ECF (Extended Care Facility)/SCU (Special Care Unit) which includes the Eden Alternative.

For this month I want to briefly mention what it might mean to have losses in your life as an elderly person.

Try this activity at home. Take 12 pieces of paper and write out: three characteristics you like about yourself; three people in your life; three things you are good at; and three items that are important to you. Place the papers face up in front of you and now imagine (1) that you are an 85 year old with dementia – take away two pieces of paper. (2) Due to your impaired spatial perception you accidentally walk into your dresser, causing you to break your hip – take away two more pieces of paper. (3) Turn the pieces of paper over. While in the hospital the doctor tells you that you need to go to a Rehab center or the Care Center (nursing home) – take away three pieces of paper. (4) Turn the papers face up again. You are having problems with ambulation and you need assistance with caring for yourself – have a friend take one paper away. (5) You now need help with all of your ADLs (activities of daily living – i.e. transfer, walking, eating, toileting, personal hygiene etc.), you can't transfer on your own and you are in bed most of the day – take away one more paper. You are now left with one paper. What is the one thing you are left with? Are you happy about that? How does this make you feel not having control of what you can or cannot do?

My goal is that by providing information in this column about the aging process aging will be a less scary prospect and just another phase or transition in life. Nelson Mandela said: “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” **(word count 577)**