Clinical Empathy: A Key Tool for Client Care

In nearly every caregiving survey, stress bubbles to the top of concerns for family caregivers. Caregivers describe their feelings using words like despair and depression. They mourn the loss of their old life, before caring for a senior loved one started to consume their days and nights.

Aging can cause a great deal of stress in seniors, as well. Physical impairments, cognitive deficits and serious illnesses like cancer can bring on feelings of anger and grief in even the most stoic person.

As a senior caregiving professional, you may be aware of the physiological effects of chronic stress. Long-term stress has been linked to an increased risk for cardiovascular disease and diabetes. For family caregivers, chronic stress can actually be lethal. The study “Caregiving as a Risk Factor for Mortality” by Richard Schutz and Scott Beach noted “participants who were providing care and experiencing caregiver strain had mortality risks that were 63% higher than noncaregiving controls.”

You can help these stressed out seniors and caregivers by practicing clinical empathy. Studies show that professionals who learn how to be empathetic can influence a senior’s or caregiver’s neurological and physiological states—including reducing stress.

What Is Clinical Empathy?
According to researcher Jodi Halpern, MD, “empathy is a mode of understanding that specifically involves emotional resonance.” In other words, empathy requires a willingness to try to understand what another person is feeling.

In a professional setting, empathy involves using communication skills to connect with your client’s emotions. Empathy can be somewhat intimidating for caregiving professionals because it requires examining your own feelings and expressing them to foster a bond with the client. It’s worth noting empathy is different from sympathy. Sympathy aligns with pity or feeling sorry for the person, while empathy aligns with emotional connectivity and understanding.

How Can I Practice Clinical Empathy with Seniors and Caregivers?
Many interpersonal communication experts have developed frameworks for interacting empathetically with clients. These approaches often are tied to helpful mnemonics like “NURSE” (Name - Understand - Respect - Support - Explore) and “CLASS” (Context - Listening - Skills - Acknowledgement - Strategy - Summary). All of these approaches offer practical suggestions for putting clinical empathy in practice. Here are a few empathy techniques to try:

- Be mindful of your body language. If your client is seated, you should sit down as well. Get face-to-face. Don’t sit too far away. Maintain an “open” body posture.
- Make eye contact. As you invite your client to express her feelings, make and maintain eye contact. This helps convey attentiveness.
- Maintain a concerned facial expression. Try to avoid appearing detached.

(Continued on page 7)
Message from the President
By: Gayle Hudgins

For those of you who read the last newsletter, you’ll realize that I’m a new face in the office of MGS President. It is most unfortunate, but totally understandable, that our elected president, Connie Bigger, submitted her resignation in mid-November, citing both personal and professional needs to step down. She is continuing to work on the MGS Conference Committee, for which we are very grateful, and we want to thank Connie for her service to our organization. As the university representative on the current Board of Directors, I volunteered to step into the office of President to finish Connie’s term and am also willing to continue as Immediate Past President next year. I’ve been a member of MGS since the mid-80’s and served on the Board of Directors from 1988-1990. Due to family and work constraints, I couldn’t commit to the presidential offices at that time, but did return to the Board in 2003-2006, serving as president from 2004 to 2005. I’ve presented at a number of MGS conferences and also support the conference through my work with the Montana Geriatric Education Center.

My day job is with the Skaggs School of Pharmacy at the University of Montana where I’m a professor in the Department of Pharmacy Practice and Director of Experiential Education. In that role, I visit pharmacies and facilities around the state so have had the opportunity to interact with many MGS members in my work. I’m also director of the Montana Geriatric Education Center, which is currently funded by the federal Health Resources and Service Administration as a Geriatric Workforce Enhancement Program. MTGEC and MGS have collaborated many times over the years to bring high quality continuing education to Montana professionals working in the field of aging.

I deeply believe in MGS and the role it plays to unite all disciplines working with older adults and to provide continuing education for all who need it. I think the group has great potential and I’m excited to provide leadership so the organization can achieve its goals. The Board will continue its work through bi-monthly telephone conference calls in December and February and at its annual meeting at the MGS Conference in Billings in April 2016.

Speaking of the MGS Conference, Jan Smith and her conference planning committee are busy putting together a great meeting with the theme of “The Personal Side of Aging”. If you would like to assist with the conference, please contact Jan at 406-647-7955 or jan.smith2@q.com. If you are interested in presenting, the Call for Presentations is on the website, or contact Jan Smith to be emailed a copy. See page 7 for details.

Again, I’m looking forward to a good year in MGS and a great conference! I hope to see you in Billings in April! In the meantime, enjoy the holidays!

Reminder: Membership Renewal
It’s time to renew your MGS Membership! Please fill out the membership form on page 8, or go to the MGS Website to renew and pay on-line. Please share with other colleagues and co-workers.
The goal of the Montana Alzheimer’s/Dementia Work Group is to improve the lives of individuals in Montana with Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias and to provide better support for their families and caregivers. The group is comprised of multiple healthcare organizations and individuals from across the state, including caregivers and patient advocates. Multiple MGS members are part of the active work group and many more are part of the 200+ member listserv that receives updates on the work group’s progress.

The group’s focus this year has been drafting the Montana State Plan on Alzheimer’s Disease and other related Dementias. To accomplish this massive task, the work group has divided the main components of the state plan into 7 subcommittees:

- Caregivers
- Community Care Support
- Community Development
- Healthcare Professional & System Development
- Legal & Financial Issues
- Public Awareness & Brain Health
- Research

The first six subcommittees have been working feverishly over past 2 months to comb through the massive amounts of data the group has collected. The goal of each subcommittee is to write a report that gives an overview of (1) best practices, (2) current status and (3) perceived gaps.

The data the group is using has been compiled from many state and federal sources, including townhall style meetings that the work group held across the state over this past summer. More townhall style meetings are currently being held on Native American Reservations and Urban Indian Health Service locations throughout the state.

The work group is hoping to have a draft state plan by early 2016.

For more information or to join our email listserv, please contact:

Holly Garcia
Email: HGarcia@BillingsClinic.org
Phone: (406) 238-2287

Alzheimer’s Association – Montana Chapter
Email: montana@alz.org
Phone: (406) 252-3053

Weblink to Guardianship Conference Videos

The following recorded presentations from the October 22nd conference “Navigating the Challenge of Guardianships” are available for only $10.00: Diminished Mental Capacity, Nuts & Bolts of Guardianship, Conservatorships, Current State of Guardianships in Montana, The Keys to a Successful Statewide Guardianship Program, Current Frauds & Scams, Advance Directives. Go to website www.BigSkySeniorServices.org and you will be given the link and the password.

You can find the speakers’ power point presentations at: http://www.bigskyseniorservices.org/guardianship-conference/. Any questions? Call Denise at 406-259-3111.
Montana Gerontology Society

UM Gerontology Society Welcomes the Holidays

By: Stefano Zamora

A young student group on campus, the UM Gerontology society was founded in October 2012 by Michael Lawrence, Bailee Guisti, and Kelly Lumpkin. All three students pursued the Minor in Gerontology offered by UM and had ties with an active network of faculty and professionals interested in aging, but realized a centralized student-run group was missing from the campus. Advised by Cindy Garthwait, Social Work, and Gayle Hudgins, Pharmacy, the UM Gerontology Society participates in many service learning projects and aims to raise awareness of gerontological issues, advocate for the rights of the aging population, and strengthen alliances with the Missoula Area Agency on Aging.

This winter, the group held their 4th annual Photos with Santa fundraiser for the Missoula Music and Memory Project, a new organization that helps victims of Alzheimer's and dementia, using music therapy. The event featured a professional photographer, an ugly sweater contest, and memories to last a lifetime. In the previous three years, the UM Gerontology Society has raised just under $2,000 to support Big Sky Honor Flights, a Montana branch of the Honor Flight Network, which works to send aging World War II veterans to see the Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C.

In addition to their annual Photos with Santa benefit, the group is currently collecting gifts for their Elder Giving Tree, an event which provides gifts for seniors from two assisted living residences in the Missoula community.

To support UMGS in providing gifts for seniors this holiday season, or to donate funds to help support important Missoula Aging Services programs, stop by Taco Sano, located at 422 N. Higgins Ave, between November 20th and December 20th.

MTGEC Webinars

The Montana Geriatric Education Center & Northwest Geriatric Workforce Enhancement Center team up to provide two webinar series in 2016:

1. January 5 - March 8 2016: 10 week Geriatric Health Course, Tuesdays 5 - 6:30 pm. Topics include Vitamins & Supplements, Falls, Insomnia, Medication Adherence, and Diabetes.

2. Late March - June 2016: 10 week Alzheimer’s Disease & Related Dementias Tuesdays 5 - 6:30 pm

Free to host a site or small group. Participants earn 1.5 contact hours each week. We are recruiting sites across Montana to host the series. All that is needed is a computer and screen for participants to view and a site manager to complete and return paperwork each week. A certificate of attendance is provided. Continuing education credit will be provided for nursing home administrators, occupational therapy, respiratory therapy and social work. Nurses requesting ANCC contact hours pay a $75 fee for the 15 contact hours through UW School of Nursing. One free nursing registration is offered to the site coordinator. For more information contact: Montana.GEC@umontana.edu or Terry Egan at 406-243-2480.

Outstanding Member Nominations

Do you know an MGS Member (not currently on the Board) who promotes professional development in the field of aging or finds exceptional ways to serve and advocate for seniors?

Criteria for the Outstanding MGS Member Award and nomination instructions are on the MGS website—www.montanagerontology.org. Deadline to nominate is February 1, 2016.
MGS Scholarship

Do you know a student who is pursuing a degree with plans to work with older adults? The Montana Gerontology Society (MGS) is sponsoring a $1000 scholarship for a Montana student who is planning a career in the field of aging. The scholarship will be awarded at the MGS Annual Conference, which will be held April 14 -15, 2016, in Billings, Montana. A one-year membership to Montana Gerontology Society and a waiver of the registration fee for the annual conference will be included with this award.

Eligible candidates must be:
- Interested in pursuing a career in gerontology and/or working with seniors in any field
- Currently enrolled in at least six (6) credit hours per semester
- Enrolled in at least six credit hours the semester following receipt of the award at the annual conference.

Preference will be given to a student attending a university or college in Montana and intending to practice/work in Montana. The MGS Scholarship Award recipient will be selected based upon the following criteria:
- Commitment to gerontology, as demonstrated by resume/vitae, educational goals, and experience
- Professional qualities described in the two (2) letters of recommendation
  - Personal statement
  - Grade Point Average

Scholarship application materials are available on the MGS website. All application materials must be postmarked by Monday, February 1, 2016.

The MGS Scholarship Committee will evaluate applications and select the recipient by early March of 2016.

The scholarship will be awarded at the MGS Annual Conference and will be sent directly to the recipient’s school. The student awarded the scholarship is expected to attend the annual conference in Billings in order to receive the award.

In addition, the student is expected to submit a short article or review for the next MGS Newsletter following the conference.

Advocacy-Critical Programs Still Facing Cuts

As the holidays approach, we are very grateful for your support of older adults throughout the year. As you know, federal programs are still operating under the Continuing Resolution (CR) passed in late September to avoid a government shutdown. The CR expires on December 11. But we know Congress is at work on budget and appropriations bills with the intent to have them completed by Thanksgiving. Unfortunately, funding proposals for aging services, like Older Americans Act programs and Medicare State Health Insurance Programs (SHIPs), are still facing the biggest cuts.

These include:
- 42% cut for SHIPs
- 20% cut to RSVP, putting at risk the thousands of volunteers who are mobilized to improve our communities every day, in addition to harmful cuts to the Corporation for National and Community Service which also funds the Foster Grandparent and Senior Companion programs
- 8% cut for Senior Community Services Employment Program (SCSEP)
- 5% cut for Falls Prevention, Chronic Disease Self-Management Education (CDSME) and for Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs)

With the new budget agreement, Congress has the opportunity to reverse these proposed cuts and make investments that reflect the needs of our growing aging population.
Montana Legislature Interim Committee Study

By: Jan Smith

During each legislative session, legislators identify issues they want to study in more depth. They appoint interim committees to conduct these and other studies during the interims between sessions. The committees often invite experts to present information to them. Members of the public also get a chance to have their say during scheduled public comment time. Legislators use what they learn from the interim studies to make well-informed decisions about what bills to consider during the next session. The Children, Families, Health & Human Services interim committee has taken on several topics to study during the current interim session. The two topics that involve aging issues are: Guardianship Services and Alzheimer’s Disease, Dementia and Caregiver Issues.


SJR 22: Guardianship/Alzheimer's Disease

The 2015 Legislature approved Senate Joint Resolution 22, which requested a study of guardianship laws and services for elderly and disabled individuals. SJR 22 asks that the Committee look at the following items as part of the study:

- existing guardianship laws to determine if they could be changed to improve protections for elderly and disabled individuals;
- guardianship services available to individuals through DPHHS;
- efforts at the local level to provide guardianship services;
- funding needs and availability for guardianship services, including an examination of current and potential funding sources;
- efforts in other states to establish uniform, statewide guardianship programs or otherwise improve guardianship services; and
- recommendations of national groups that work on matters related to guardianship for vulnerable citizens.

At its June meeting, several members of the Montana Alzheimer’s/Dementia Work Group gave public comment, and the committee decided to expand the scope of the study to include topics related to Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

At its September meeting, they heard presentations from state officials, attorneys, and a district court judge about how guardianship laws and proceedings are carried out.

At their November 2015 meeting in Billings, committee members heard from representatives of guardianship programs provided by the Yellowstone Guardianship Council, Area II Agency on Aging, and Western Montana Chapter-Prevention of Elder Abuse regarding the services they provide and the individuals they serve. They also heard in-depth presentations on the prevalence, causes, stages, and treatments for Alzheimer's disease; the community-based services and types of facilities that provide care for dementia patients; the experiences and thoughts of family caregivers; and the activities of the Montana Alzheimer's/Dementia Work Group, which is in the midst of preparing a plan for addressing Alzheimer's disease in the state.

To find out more information about the Interim Committee go to: http://www.leg.mt.gov/. Click on Interim, then Interim Committees. This Study is under Children, Families, Health & Human Services. The entire link is: http://leg.mt.gov/css/committees/interim/2015-2016/Children-Family/default.asp. You will find access to past archived video recorded meetings, overview of State Laws, the SJR22 Study Plan, related links and study materials, future meeting dates and agendas. If you are interested in being present at an upcoming meeting at the Capitol in Helena, the dates are: Jan. 11, March 10-11, May 9, June 20, and Aug. 25-26.
Montana Gerontology Society

MGS Annual Conference  Billings — April 14-15, 2016

By: Jan Smith

The Planning Committee is in full force. We’ve secured the Billings Hotel and Convention Center, off I-90 on the west end, as the venue.

This year’s theme is “The Personal Side of Aging”. As professionals in the aging network, not only do we serve and care for our patients, clients, residents, and customers, but we relate to them on a personal level. Many of us are also caring for aging parents, a spouse, a sibling or a friend. We wear many hats in this “personal side of aging”.

We are currently identifying topics and potential speakers. MGS encourages members and colleagues to share their expertise in the field of aging with others in the form of presentations during the Annual MGS Conference. There will be three tracks – Medical/Clinical, Psycho/Social/ Human Services, and Alzheimer’s/Dementia and Caregiving Issues. We will also be promoting this conference to the public – seniors, baby boomers, retirees.

If you have a great presentation we would love to have you share it! Presentations are scheduled for the duration of 60 or 90 minute intervals, and run throughout various times of the two day conference. Presentations are voluntary, and you will receive a discount for conference registration.

If you are interested in presenting, you can find the Call for Presentations on the MGS website – www.montanagerontology.org, or email jan.smith2@q.com. This initial presentation proposal is due to the Committee by January 11th. If your presentation is selected, you will be asked to fill out the required forms for CEU.

Hope you will circle the dates of April 14 & 15 on your calendar!

(Continued from page 1 - Stuff)

● Don’t be afraid to touch. You can convey empathy and understanding through laying your hand on your client’s forearm or shoulder.

● Lower your vocal register. Stress often causes a person’s pitch to rise. Strive for a calm, soothing tone.

● Observe the other person’s body language and facial expression. To fully practice empathy, don’t rely solely on what a person is saying. ‘Read’ their entire message by tuning in to their body language.

● Verbalize your understanding of their emotions. Identify and label the underlying emotions you hear and see expressed. Use phrases like “that sounds very distressing,” “you look sad when you say that” or “many people would feel angry in that situation.”

● Relate your own emotions. After acknowledging the other person’s feelings, you may express your own emotions. You can say things like “when something similar happened to me one time, I felt incredibly frustrated” or “it grieves me, too, to see Jim declining like this.”

● Do not counter an emotion with a fact. If a person says, “I feel scared about what the future holds,” do not say, “Well, only about one in ten seniors actually die from this disease.” Instead, simply acknowledge the person’s fear with a statement such as, “I would probably feel scared, too, if this were my mother.”

● Offer to help with the emotional distress. Try to identify some ways in which you can help alleviate your client’s stress. Note this is different from addressing the underlying medical condition. Don’t say, “Rest assured we will do everything we can to get this diabetes under control.” Instead say, “As you said, diabetes can be very scary. Would it help to sit down with a diabetes educator to learn more about the disease?”

Clinical Empathy Can Improve the Care Experience for Everyone

When you practice clinical empathy, you offer your clients a holistic experience that includes caring for their emotions. Studies link high clinical empathy with improved patient satisfaction scores, and care providers also report feelings of greater satisfaction. Clearly clinical empathy is an important skill to add to your caregiving toolkit.

From: http://www.caregiverstress.com/geriatric-professional-resources/professional-development/
Montana Gerontology Society
Membership Application
Membership Year: January 1- December 31

Name________________________________________________
Address______________________________________________
City____________________________________________________
State__________ Zip______________________________
Phone (w)____________________ (h)________________________
email__________________________________________________

For MGS Only—will not be distributed to other organizations
Position________________________________________________
Employer_______________________________________________

Type of Membership
☐ Professional, Aging Services, Academia $30.00
☐ Public, Senior, Retiree, $15.00
☐ Student, University/College No Charge
I would like to make a contribution to MGS:
$25 $50 $75 $100 Other________

As a member of MGS, I may be interested in being involved in the following area(s):
☐ Fundraising
☐ Serving on a committee
☐ Making a presentation
☐ Holding an elected office
☐ Writing an article for the newsletter
☐ Other (Please list a skill you might be able to share)
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

Make Checks Payable to MGS:
P O Box 3583
Billings MT 59103-3583 or renew and pay on-line
at www.montanagerontology.org

Montana Gerontology Society