

Joe and Thelma Hedgepath – Case Synopsis

Joe and Thelma Hedgepath are both patients of Dr. Townsend. They usually come in for their visits together, although Joe has become quite frail and has functional limitations (uses a walker due to advanced osteoarthritis, very short of air on exertion, and often edematous lower extremities) which prevent him from making it in to the office. The couple has been married for 60 years. They live in an isolated rural area about 30 miles from Dr. Townsend's office. Neither has experienced any cognitive changes outside of forgetfulness at times.

Their son, Danny, age 58, lives with the Hedgepath's and usually brings them for their visits. He was disabled in a tractor accident and is a recovering alcoholic. While Danny is a devoted son, he often becomes impatient with his parents. The family struggles with finances as all are on fixed incomes: Thelma and Joe have their Social Security only and Danny receives a small disability check. Joe and Thelma also have two married daughters who live in Louisville; each has three children whom Thelma and Joe adore. The daughters, Debby and Kathy, visit frequently but both have jobs and their children are involved in many different sports and activities. They tend to be critical of Danny's caregiving. For the past couple of years, Joe and Thelma have struggled due to their functional limitations. They felt overwhelmed and could no longer handle their financial affairs. Danny offered to move in with them and help them manage their income and they gratefully accepted. The daughters, Debby and Kathy are now worried that Danny has complete access to their parents' money, and worry that his intentions are not to look out for his parent's interests, but to take advantage of them.

Joe is a 90 year old Army Veteran who was involved in active combat during the Korean War. He has an annual appointment at the Veteran Administration Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC), and receives his medications through the VA. He also sees Dr. Townsend for issues that develop between annual VA visits (colds, flu, new symptoms, etc.). It is difficult for him to get to the VA clinic and he often has long waits when he goes there for an appointment.

Joe suffers from a number of chronic conditions including congestive heart failure (CHF), chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, diabetes, renal failure (not yet requiring dialysis), and osteoarthritis. He uses a walker to get around as his functional ability is limited by the arthritis, a back injury he received during active combat, and general weakness and frailty.

Joe Hedgepath's medications are:

Carvedilol 6.25mg twice daily

Furosemide 80 mg daily

Lisinopril 20mg daily

Digoxin 0.25mg daily

Potassium Chloride 20mEq daily

Tolterodine 2mg twice daily

Indomethacin 25mg daily

Allopurinol 300mg daily

Albuterol HFA rescue inhaler

Spiriva (tiotropium) Inhaler 2 puffs daily

Advair (fluticasone/salmeterol) 250/50 mcg one puff every 12 hours

Glyburide 10mg twice daily

Pioglitazone 30mg daily

Simvastatin 40mg daily at bedtime

Aspirin 325 mg daily

Thelma, age 87, was fairly healthy until she was diagnosed with metastatic lung cancer 8 months ago. First line treatment failed to slow the progression of her disease. Her blood counts dropped severely after her chemo treatments and she could not tolerate the epoetin alfa (Epogen) shots given to stimulate her bone marrow due to the headache and body aches they caused. Because of the side effects of the medications (nausea, body aches, neuropathy and fatigue), she chose not to attempt further chemotherapy. Her oncologist referred her back to Dr. Townsend to be followed in the community. Her current complaints are weakness and weight loss. She has lost twenty pounds during the past 8 months and has a poor appetite.

Thelma Hedgepath's medications are:

- Glucophage XR 500mg daily
- Prinivil 20mg daily
- Celebrex 400mg daily
- Good Sense ibuprofen Infants 50mg twice daily
- Feldene 20mg daily
- Neurontin 600mg daily
- Paxil 30mg daily

Danny is concerned over the recent changes in his mother's attitude and activities. Previously an outgoing, vivacious woman who loved her family and her church, Thelma has withdrawn from all activities and shows little interest when the grandchildren visit. She previously loved to knit and was always working on a sweater, scarf or hat for a family member but now she just stares at the television or sleeps most of the time. When her friends from church or grandchildren visit, she goes to her bedroom and has Danny tell them she is asleep. Debbie and Kathy blame Danny for the weight loss as they claim he doesn't prepare the right foods or try to get Thelma and Joe to eat.

Today Danny has brought Thelma in for an appointment with Dr. Townsend. She has been running a fever for the past three days. She has also been coughing up greenish-yellow sputum. Although she is still drinking fluids, Danny hasn't been able to get her to eat anything except small amounts of ice cream. Danny also wants to talk with Dr. Townsend about the increased caregiving needs for his parents. Thelma used to help Joe with his activities of daily living, but with her recent illness, she is unable to provide any care to him. Danny is overwhelmed and is not comfortable with providing personal care to both of his parents. He is also worried that his mother is dying and wonders how his dad will adjust without her.

Dr. Townsend treats Thelma's respiratory infection with antibiotics. Realizing that the Hedgepath's have multiple problems they must overcome in dealing with their situation and remaining in the home, she refers the couple to the Flourish program for integrated community-based care and asks the Community Health Navigator to complete an initial assessment.