

Offices in
Suffolk and
Virginia Beach, Virginia
Tel: 757-399-7506
Fax: 757-397-1267
Web: www.oasthook.com



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Editor
Sandra L. Smith,
Certified Elder Law Attorney

A PACEMAKER AND OUR HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

Recently, the *New York Times* published an article that describes how the modern medical system destroyed a family's life and journey through the aging process. The family featured in the article centered around a couple in their mid-eighties who had been together since World War II. The wife and mother was fiercely independent and intelligent, and the husband and father was well educated and stubborn. The couple had always been together, had two children, and lived what most would consider to be the American dream. The article goes on to describe how the modern medical system and Medicare had treated the couple well. Neither of them had any major illnesses and any minor illnesses they had were primarily covered by Medicare and a Medicare supplement policy so their finances had not been devastated by an illness. For all purposes they were happy with the healthcare they had received for most of their lives.

Unfortunately, the husband suffered a stroke at age 79. Part of his treatment was to have a pacemaker installed. The stroke completely changed the lives of the couple because they went from being an independent couple to an infirm man being cared for by his wife. The article explains that in years past the stroke would have caused the death of the husband but, due to our medical system, the husband was able to survive. According to the author, "thanks to advanced medical technologies, elderly people now survive repeated health crises that once killed them, and so the 'oldest old' have become the nation's most rapidly growing age group."

The story goes on to describe that a progressive form of dementia was one of the side affects of the husband's stroke. Eventually, the husband became, like so many dementia patients, unable to communicate or act on his own. He became totally dependent on his wife for everything from going to the bathroom to eating. His condition caused exhaustion and resulted in a heart condition for his wife. Eventually, the only thing keeping the husband alive was the pacemaker which far outlived his mental capacity.

The point of the article was to describe our current healthcare system. While the family had requested information on alternatives to the pacemaker, the likelihood of recovery, quality of life, prognosis, etc., few answers were provided to the family. The family was led down a path which provided maximum revenue to the doctors, hospitals, and specialists involved, but did not take into consideration the patient's quality of life. The pacemaker that had been installed caused years of suffering and heartache to this typical American family. Only after the pacemaker had been installed did the family find out that there were reasonable alternatives. Not one of the husband's treating physicians or specialists had discussed or described alternatives even after being asked by the family. The family had a wonderful relationship with their primary care physician, but after the husband entered the hospital, he was no longer involved in the family's care.

The modern healthcare system can work wonders and extend our lives significantly longer now than ever before; however, few people in the healthcare industry stop to consider how extending life can affect quality of life for the patient and the patient's family. Further, the healthcare system is disjointed; an individual's primary care physician has no involvement with treatment if the individual has a medical crisis. Having an advocate who can lead a person through the healthcare system and who can connect the broken links is crucial and can provide a family with options, alternatives, and quality of life.

Oast & Hook's life care planning program can help connect the dots in today's healthcare system by helping clients through the continuum of care and the healthcare maze. Please contact Oast & Hook if we can assist you.

Ask Allie

O&H: Allie, we've heard about a special cat working at a YWCA in Idaho. Please tell us about her.

Allie: Sure! Moco arrived at the YWCA in Lewiston, Idaho, in 2001. The YWCA operates a homeless shelter, and some of the residents were feeding her. The YWCA adopted Moco, and now she helps run the Y and takes care of its residents, who primarily are dealing with domestic violence and sexual assault. Wendy Diessner, director of operations for the Y, says that Moco "seems to have a sixth sense of who needs that connection with her the most. She'll be upstairs all day just hanging out with staff, and then she'll head downstairs when a family that needs help comes in." She spends time with the children at the shelter, watching them do their homework, and is available at the women's support group meetings. The staff believes that Moco is a survivor, much like the Y's residents. "She was a homeless cat at a homeless shelter," Diessner says. "We decided we should keep her here. She's independent and loving.. She really does embody what the Y stands for." That is a great story. Good job, Moco! Time to find my mom and play for a while before my nap. See you next week!

Announcements

Oast & Hook attorney Letha McDowell will speak on the topic of health reform and seniors from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m, Monday, September 27th at the United Way office located at 2515 Walmer Avenue, Norfolk, Virginia 23513. For more information on this presentation, please phone Jennie Dell at 757-399-7506.

Oast & Hook attorney Brian A. Boys will speak on the topic of veterans benefits from 5:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., Tuesday, October 12th at Commonwealth Memory Care located at 1516 Harmon Street, Norfolk, Virginia 23518. For more information on this presentation, please phone Jennie Dell at 757-399-7506.

Oast & Hook attorney Sandra Smith will speak on the topic of estate planning from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., Monday, October 18th at Fort Monroe. For more information on this presentation, please phone Jennie Dell at 757-399-7506.

Distribution of This Newsletter

Oast & Hook encourages you to share this newsletter with anyone who is interested in issues pertaining to the elderly, the disabled and their advocates. The information in this newsletter may be copied and distributed, without charge and without permission, but with appropriate citation to Oast & Hook, P.C. If you are interested in a free subscription to the *Oast & Hook News*, then please e-mail us at mail@oasthook.com, telephone us at 757-399-7506, or fax us at 757-397-1267.

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