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Everything They Need – Right at Hand • February 15, 2017

EDITOR'S PEN

Gary Barg, Editor-in-Chief

Caregiver Communique

Nancy Smoot

Program Director of Integrant

Gary Barg: So many times after our loved ones return home from the hospital, it becomes obvious how inconvenient and dangerous our homes can be when we care for them. And so that's why I was really tickled when I found out about the atHand Overbed Table System. Nancy, can you tell us about the system and how it helps family caregivers?

Nancy Smoot: The atHand Overbed Table System is a very modern and feature-rich version of an overbed table. Usually in a hospital or a nursing home you'll see these, but they're very basic. They're meant just as a place for the food tray or maybe some personal items. But they very easily get cluttered and you're still left needing other things that the table doesn't help with. So the atHand Overbed Table System was designed to incorporate all of the things that people feel they need and would like close-by if they have limited mobility. We did a lot of focus groups to find out what those items were. And that is why the table includes power and USB ports. It has integrated lighting that is adjustable in brightness as well as where you place it on the table. The table is height-adjustable, but it also angles in toward the user, so you can really get it up close to you if you're writing or working on a laptop. In addition to all of those features, we also have storage compartments, because that way you can still have all of your things, but they're neatly organized and they're not on the tray.

In addition to all of those features, we came up with some optional accessories. Like a special cup holder that keeps the drink close by, but off the table. We have a bin for tissues, which is something everybody has near their bedside, but the box takes up a lot of room on the tray table. We also have a trashcan because it helps with infection control to have the trash in a separate place, but, close by.

Gary Barg: The other thing is it's very handsome. I have to tell you, it's a lovely piece of work. I wouldn't mind having this in my bedroom.

Nancy Smoot:

Something that came out loud and clear in the focus groups is, *if I'm out of the hospital, I don't want to be reminded of when I was in the hospital*. That's why we chose darker, richer colors because those are something that you're not going to see in a facility. It does have a homier look.

Gary Barg: What have you heard from family caregivers who have used the table?

Nancy Smoot: We've heard how it makes their life a lot easier; the power outlets in particular because older homes have fewer outlets and most of the time they're going to be lower to the floor or behind furniture. We have one power cord that attaches to the wall, which then powers the table with four, 120-volt outlets, and four USB ports.

Gary Barg: How do I order the table?

Nancy Smoot: It's easy. You can order it on the website, www.athandtable.com. We manufacture in the Cleveland area, but sell nationally from that website.

Gary Barg: Are people buying to use for themselves as well as their loved ones?

Nancy Smoot: Some have, yes. I would say the majority of people are buying it for somebody else because they want the person that needs it to feel a sense of independence. And so it's good for the caregiver, but it's also good for the user so they don't have to rely on somebody to do the really simple things.

Gary Barg: With as much care that is happening at home, it was only a matter of time before somebody developed a system like this.

Nancy Smoot: We've heard stories of caregivers that have kind of pieced things like this together. They have a power strip looped over the headboard

and a TV tray table next to the bed. From speaking with caregivers, I know that they feel bad they can't always be there for their loved one because they're probably managing a career and children of their own, and don't have as much time as they would like to be with their loved one. So, if this product can help give the caregiver peace of mind, knowing that their loved one has everything they need to last them through the day, then that goes directly to the purpose of why we developed the product.

Gary Barg: Peace of mind is everything for family caregivers. I think that the biggest challenge, when you're at work or away from your loved one, is they could fall out of bed reaching for something, or just have to make moves that aren't appropriate for them.

Nancy Smoot: We really did our research to try to come up with a way to fit everything within reach. And you can actually not be in a bed to use it because the tray table angles toward the user. You can use it next to a recliner, even if it's one of the larger ones where the tray table may not fit underneath the chair. If you have it alongside the chair and the tray table angled in, it still fits nice and close so you can use the tray table as a desk or for whatever you need.

Gary Barg: Nancy, if you only had one piece of advice to share with a family caregiver what would it be?

Nancy Smoot: I would simply say don't be too hard on yourself. What you're doing for a loved one is so important that you may not feel like you're doing enough. But, the fact that you're there and you're supporting your loved one is huge.

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