

## Supporting the Mental Health of Older People Living in the Community

Eddie is a 77 year old man who lives alone in his own home on a large allotment in a regional town in South Australia. His wife Mary died unexpectedly 18 months ago from a stroke, two days after undergoing surgery to remove a malignant tumour. She died in hospital.

Her death was a shock and their eldest child, Tom remembers Eddie questioning the surgeon after the operation, *"What happened? This surgery was supposed to make her better."* Prior to her illness, Eddie and Mary were both keen bird watchers. They joined the local club after Eddie retired from his job as a sales manager some 17 years ago. It was something they both really enjoyed. Eddie in particular was a highly regarded and experienced member of the local bird watching club.

He and Mary would meet other club members in town, weekly for morning tea. He stopped bird watching shortly before Mary's death, saying he found driving across town for the meetings too difficult. Several members still keep in touch and visit Eddie to share their experiences and photographs. He often cancels their meetings stating that he is not feeling well. He also no longer contributes to the club's blog. His only outing is a weekly trip to the dump.

Aside from Tom, who lives nearby, Eddie has two daughters, Helen and Kate. Both are married and live and work in Adelaide. Tom usually visits weekly to check up on things. Helen and Kate visit Eddie most months.

Tom recently expressed concern about the family dog, who has gained a lot of weight in the past couple of months. *"What are you feeding him Dad? He's getting so fat."* Eddie says that *"he has more important things to worry about than how fat the dog is getting."* Tom updates his sisters about their father, and in his last call to Helen, he shared his concerns, saying *"I'm getting really worried about Dad. Every time I ask him about the dog or anything for that matter, it either falls upon deaf ears or he snaps back at me. I can't seem to have a decent conversation with him."*

Eddie is on medication for cholesterol, blood pressure and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAIDs) for his osteoarthritis. He had a fall four weeks ago, suffering a loss of consciousness, injuring his right hip, and was admitted for three days to the local hospital.

Xrays and CT scans showed no fractures and changes consistent with his age on CT scan of his brain. Tom knows that the hospital physiotherapist gave his Dad a range of mobility exercises to perform, but has decided not to ask about these, as his Dad is almost always *"in one of his moods and is moaning about pain."* The crutches that were provided to help Eddie get about when he came home from hospital look like they have been strewn across the floor.

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Tom's aunty, Joan, his mum's sister has been really helpful following the surgery, cooking meals and dropping over to make sure that Eddie is alright. As part of the discharge process at the hospital, Eddie was connected with a local home and community care provider and a personal care worker visits weekdays to help him shower and dress. The service also provides help with his housework on a weekly basis, and fortnightly shopping.

During his most recent visit, Tom noticed a couple of Joan's uneaten meals in the fridge and suggested a visit to the GP. He made an appointment and arranges for him and Joan to take his Dad the next day.

During Eddie's consultation, the GP checks the hospital discharge summary and says to Eddie, *"Was everything alright in hospital? It is says here that you were often restless at night and were a little bit agitated at times."* Eddie responds quite angrily, *"Well, I was in a lot of pain. Mary would understand, but I don't think anyone else does. That surgery she had was supposed to make her better."*

**Did you know...**

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