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# Grantee Spotlight: Patient Navigator

Elaine Mamer wishes the JFS Patient Navigator Program had been available to her mother-in-law before she passed away. "She disliked needing to call her kids for help," she recalls. "Here is a program that would have enabled Mom to go to her doctors' appointments, keeping her own counsel and maintain her independence."



Through her work as a volunteer Patient Navigator, Elaine is able to do just that. Patient Navigators are trained volunteers who prepare older adults for their medical appointments, accompany them to the consultations, take notes reminding them of the questions they wanted to ask, help arrange follow-up visits, and compile a written record of the appointment for the older adult to share with family or other caregivers.

A Patient Navigator assists and empowers. "A good navigator," says Elaine, a longtime JFS volunteer, "is dependable and empathetic, and creates the space for an older adult to have dignity and independence." Elaine describes her relationship with Anne R, someone she has accompanied many times, as a "partnership."

"As a result of unfortunate circumstances, Anne went from being an active senior to one who is now dependent on others for assistance," Elaine explains. "Both of her sons have disabilities and are physically unable to help her. That Anne is willing to accept help has relieved them of ongoing stress. I call her before her appointments and we review the questions she wants to have answered. On the day of the appointment, I'm the driver and the scribe. She is a delightful and appreciative companion, and with her permission JFS sends her sons a copy of my notes."

Elaine, a former health educator for the American Cancer Society, recently teamed up with fellow volunteer, retired nurse Janet Lipkin, to train the latest group of Patient Navigators. Many of the new volunteers cited their own experiences caring for family members as their motivation.

"Having been caregivers, they see the value in having an impartial person accompany a loved one" Elaine hopes she can inspire others to become Patient Navigators. "As health care professionals during our working lives, Janet and I appreciate and admire the way the program prepares the volunteers and the support it gives to older patients. As we live longer, we reach a time in our lives when we might need more assistance than we are willing or able to receive from our families."

She herself has gained an invaluable perspective on her own aging and accessing health care. "I have learned a new approach I use with my personal physicians. I am better prepared for appointments; I come with a list of questions, and I write everything down. Most of all," she says, "I would not hesitate to ask someone to come along with me. What lies ahead of me as I get older, no longer seems so mysterious. I know that I will be able to manage when programs like JFS's Patient Navigators exist."

*Elaine Mamer is a long time Framingham resident and also is a volunteer water aerobics instructor at the Metrowest YMCA. This profile was written by Julie Wolf.*

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