



Medical Loan Closets

Offering a Treasure Trove of Free Equipment

BY JANE
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As many of my readers know, I have been a family caregiver for a long time.

My partner and I have been providing in-home care to my now 93-year old mother in law since 2008 and it hasn't been without its challenges. However, we have also stumbled upon services and supports that were most unexpected and have made a world of difference along the way.

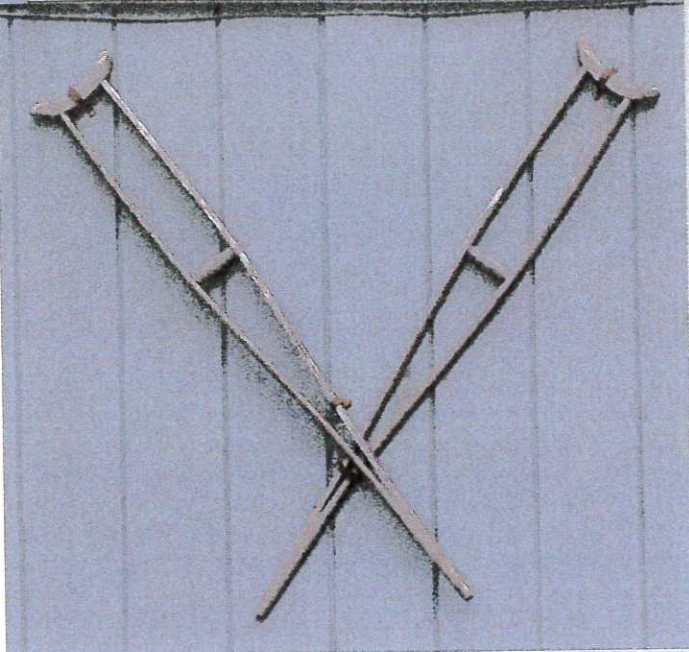
A few months ago, we were in our town of Windham purchasing a new shower seat which we hoped would enable my mother-in-law to sit more comfortably in her walk-in shower. A woman on the check-out line said, "Why don't you just go to the Windham Loan Closet? It is managed through the Town of Windham and you can get a seat just like that for free." We had never heard of the Loan Closet, and asked for more information. She explained that right next to our public library, there is a small, one-room building

where we can borrow medical equipment. We were incredulous – free medical equipment? We bought the seat anyway, just in case.

The next day, we called the Township and left a message. A volunteer, Barbara Hall, called us back and we made an appointment to visit the Loan Closet. When we walked in, we couldn't believe our eyes. Walkers, a hospital bed, scooters, wheel chairs, shower seats, and more filled the room. Barbara explained that people donate equipment they no longer need for the benefit of those who do need them either short or long-term. One simply "checks out" the item, just like a book at the library, with the understanding that the item will be returned to the Loan Closet when no longer needed. Not only did we find a shower seat, we found one that swivels and slides – just right for my mother-in-law's needs.

Barbara is one of seven volunteers who manage the Loan Closet on a two-week cycle year-round. While local residents need to make an appointment with a volunteer to enter the Loan Closet, physical therapists and other professionals can obtain a key through the public library which is right next door.

WINDHAM HEALTH COUNCIL LOAN CLOSET



There are approximately
15 Medical Loan Closets in Maine,
all offering free medical
equipment to the community.

There are approximately 15 such Medical Loan Closets in Maine, all offering free medical equipment to the community. Some require that borrowers be residents of that specific community, but some, like the one in Windham, are happy to lend equipment to anyone who needs it. "People who use the Loan Closet are already under a lot of stress," says Windham Loan Closet volunteer Kristi MacKinnon. "They may have suffered an injury or they might be a caregiver, but with the Loan Closet, we can alleviate the anxiety about buying expensive medical equipment. Everything we have is free and people really appreciate that."

The Loan Closets in Maine are also good for families when older relatives come for a visit. "Many people ask to borrow a wheelchair or walker for just a few days when, for example, Grandma is coming

for a high-school or college graduation," says Kristi. "This can make it more comfortable for everyone in the family."

Some clients choose to make financial donations when they return the equipment and this money is used to purchase other items that are harder to find.

For more information about Loan Closets in Maine, go to www.211maine.org and search for "loan closet." For a copy of AARP Maine's new Caregiver Resource Guide, send an email to me@aarp.org. MSW

If you are interested in starting a Loan Closet in your own community contact your Town Manager and talk to them about developing a plan. With 178,000 family caregivers in Maine, this is a great opportunity to share much-needed medical equipment for the benefit of others.

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