

Geriatric Care Managers: The Eyes and Ears For Caring Children Who Live Afar

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When your elderly parents live far away, who will be your eyes and ears? Who will educate you about the confusing elder care system? Younger folks have never had to learn about Medicaid, Medicare, Long Term Care Insurance, etc. More foreign yet is the unspoken politics of doctors, hospitals, nursing homes and home health care companies. Everyone seems to have an opinion about what is best, but sometimes these opinions conflict. The doctor wants to send the patient home. The hospital social worker is arranging for nursing home or assisted living facilities to do an assessment for possible placement or rehabilitation. Your parents may be rejecting the idea of hiring a home health aide. Who will be your parents' unbiased advocate? Even if concerned children rush to their parents' hospital bedside, how will they know all of their options and most importantly, what these options will cost? Geriatric Care Managers are professional elder care consultants hired by families to represent *their* interests and only *their* interests. A legitimate Care Manager takes no referral fees from any company or facility to whom they make a referral. They are paid by the patient to have an unbiased interest in seeing that the patient's needs are met.

It is common today for people to leave the family home town and retire in resort areas like Florida and Arizona. The problem comes ten to twenty years later. The now aged parents have needs, but their children are living far away. The first time the kids hop a plane to respond to a family emergency, it is no problem. When the problems escalate and that child is now taking significant time away from work and family to assist their parents, the situation can become critical. As a Care Manager I have met many couples whose marriages are strained by caregiver duties. Not only are their marriages strained, their wallets are strained. Most are unaware of financial programs which may help offset expensive health care costs. When costly services are needed, families need to know what a reasonable amount to pay is. Children who care enough to help their elderly parents often find it is not easy. Depression Era parents sometimes distrust their children when it comes to financial and medical decision making. They either think of them like an eleven year old or have negative opinions about the way their children have spent money in the past. Either way, the concerned children can be dismayed to find that their parents will listen to the advice of a stranger rather than the advice of their own family. Care Managers can be that concerned outsider whose expert advice will be heeded.

A Classic Example:

Rose and Morris were married nearly sixty years and their mindset was shaped by the Great Depression. In their day, it was inappropriate to tell their children how much they earned or saved. When Rose entered a nursing home, Morris was uncomfortable with his daughter's attempts to get involved in the financial discussions. Once he learned that Rose would have to stay in the nursing home, he knew that he would need help applying for Medicaid. Once his daughter found a Geriatric Care Manager who seemed to "know

her stuff” he let his new *team* help him. The Care Manager and the daughter worked together to gather all the financial documents. They worked within the Medicaid guidelines to shelter a little money and apply for his Veteran Benefits. Because of the extra financial assistance, Morris was able to maintain his standard of living. The Care Manager thoroughly assessed their medical, social, financial, insurance and housing needs, and was able to help Rose and Morris maximize their finances to provide the best possible quality of life for both of them. Their daughter was able to return to New York and sleep well at night knowing she had a Care Manager to be her partner in the care of her parents. The Care Manager visited Morris and Rose regularly and gave their daughter informative updates. When problems arose, the Care Manager responded quickly and appropriately. Their daughter was able to spend her visits creating special memories with them instead of flying down for crisis after crisis. When Rose and Morris finally passed away, their daughter was left with fond memories and comforted by the knowledge that she helped her parents make informed decisions so they could live their final years in comfort, with dignity and on their own terms.