

Who Is Taking Care Of Mom And Dad?

Written by Patty Casey Monday, 05 October 2009



Caring For The Elderly

Navigating life's transitions is something everyone will experience as we journey from one stage to another. These transitions range from chronic illness, unexpected health concerns to the normal processes of aging.

Often times the need for care occurs without any warning, as when a stroke or another medical condition suddenly happens to you or a family member. Most people who confront this situation do so for the first time. Even when the transition is a slowly evolving process, many families struggle with how to best provide and care for their relative.

Every situation is unique, the challenges new. The solutions found to deal with the care needs vary, based on family abilities and resources - both emotional and financial. The emotional toll in caring for a loved one is often compounded by the lack of information and the overload of many confusing options that need to be considered.

According to a recent United Nations study, the older population is growing at a faster rate than the world's total population. The fast-growing "senior" generation is beginning to put a great deal of stress on family members who are attempting to provide the care required by their mother or father. Not only do the seniors need help; their families need help and support too.

Many times the family caregivers simply don't know where to turn for help and advice. Large geographical distances can add a unique and complicated challenge to what is already an often stressful job of caring for a family member whose health is deteriorating.

What type of help is "out there" for the daughters and sons (sometimes called the sandwich generation)? According to a recent study by the AARP, 1 in 4 women are managing the healthcare of an

older parent or relative. Navigating through the health care system is often frustrating and can take away valuable time that you want to spend with your loved one.

Determining the availability of services is complicated because the delivery system is fragmented, which makes it very difficult and frustrating for the do-it-yourself process. A senior, or their family member, must navigate through numerous agencies and referral sources to find housing, medical care, financial planning, supplies etc. Having a selection of choices is wonderful, but the number of choices may become overwhelming. Using care professionals can be a very cost effective and efficient way to provide help for a loved one.

“Hiring professional advisors or providers to help with long term care is no different than using professionals to help with other complex issues such as car repairs, dealing with taxes, dealing with legal problems, or needing trained employees to help run a business. With their education and training, long term care professionals also bring experience that only comes from dealing with countless hands-on care giving challenges”. National Care Planning Council

It is important to find a professional who knows what questions to ask to assist in the creation and implementation of a plan that meets the desires and fulfills the needs of the individual.

Kathy Noojin, LMSW, Care Navigator at Long Term Care Authority (www.ltca.org) in Tulsa, OK, emphasizes the overall importance of finding the right professional for assistance: “Choosing someone who is competent to guide your loved one through the incredibly complex array of long term care services is the single most important decision you will make. With skilled professional services you will avoid a lot of headaches and heartaches in deciding which options make the most sense for your situation”.

The professional you hire can go by many names: Care Navigator, Geriatric Care Manager, Elder Care Manager, Elder Care Referral Service, Senior Care Advisor. The list of names is almost endless. As with other professionals, be sure to get references and investigate qualifications and background. Trying to make the best decisions about care giving can be difficult for you and your aging loved one. Asking for help is a big step. There are many organizations and professionals that can help you. Reduce your stress and make that call!

About the author: Patty Casey is a Registered Nurse currently with the Long Term Care Authority of Tulsa where she is Manager of Contract Administration and Clinical Compliance. Patty earned her B.S. in Business Management and completed her Master of Arts degree with business concentration. Patty also has experience with the long term care systems in Texas and Oregon and has served as a long term care consultant.