

## **Our Geriatric Care Manager – a Godsend for Caregiving Families**

*To families struggling with the needs of aging relatives, the geriatric care manager can be a godsend. This emerging breed of specialist can assess a senior's physical, social, and financial needs and stitch together a patchwork of services to address them.*

*BusinessWeek*, "Sometimes You Need an Ace", By Susan Garland, July 12, 2004.

Unpaid caregivers, usually friends and family members, provide the majority of support for disabled individuals in the United States, grossing the equivalent of \$350 billion in free labor in 2006 -- more than the total Medicaid or Medicare expenditures in 2005 -- according to AARP, a non-profit membership association for those ages 50 and up.

About 34 million Americans act as caregivers, devoting an average of 21 hours a week to the task. These individuals provide 80 percent of the long-term care received in the United States, but many lack the time and training to give their loved ones the care they need, said Melody Barnes, executive vice president for policy at the Center for American Progress, a progressive think tank.

"Family caregivers often have low to no training (and) have to juggle multiple roles at home and in the labor force," Barnes said at a 2007 panel discussion. Yet children, who may not live near their aging parents, are often in no position to help.

### **Enter the Geriatric Care Manager.**

In response to the needs of caregiving families, an industry of local care coordinators is emerging to bridge the gap between far-off relatives and aging parents who may be overwhelmed by the labyrinth of medical and other services designed to help the aged and infirm survive in their own homes.

Care managers often employ nurses, social workers and counselors. They typically assess a troubled situation, then make referrals or help arrange needed services, including personal care or professional guidance. Such coordinators may continue to monitor a household, serving as "eyes and ears" for far-flung family members.

"We had four calls from children this week," said Bunni Dybnis, director of professional services at LivHome Inc., a Los Angeles-based company that coordinates care for struggling seniors.

Dybnis and others note that it is often during a holiday visit or other infrequent trips home that an adult child notices an unsettling change. Packets of prescriptions lie unopened on the counter. A once-immaculate house is unkempt. A cool-headed individual is suddenly given to erratic swings in mood. Sometimes such details might flag a decline, perhaps the result of Alzheimer's disease or other chronic woes.

"What's it like in the refrigerator?" asked Elinor Ginzler, a specialist in long-term care at AARP. "Is there food in that refrigerator, and is it fresh? . . . It's that kind of recognition while you're visiting that all may not be as well as it was in the past."

According to an article in the January 2008 Los Angeles Times, Evelyn Kahan, 61, a teacher who lives near Monterey, reported that her 86-year-old mother started having memory problems four years ago. Kahan hired a local care manager to help her mother remain in the home she had occupied for half a century. The manager found a driver to take the older woman on errands as well as in-home aides to provide basic assistance in such areas as bathing and "to make sure she has a couple of decent meals a day."

Kahan described the help as an enormous "stress reliever" for her and her sister. "Whatever we need, we just call . . . and we know it will be fine," she said.

Care managers say they can help even highly educated consumers contend with a plethora of care choices or put together the recipe of support that will enable the struggling older person to live in safety and independence.

The Elder Law Group of Frascogna Courtney, PLLC is proud to have on staff **Leigh Leverette, BA, CMC**, a Certified Care Manager and member of the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers ([www.caremanager.org](http://www.caremanager.org)). Leigh provides personalized, client-centered services designed to assure the greatest independence and quality of care for clients with disabilities and their families. She conducts personal assessments to identify client health and financial needs, conducts home and nursing facility assessments to find and maintain a healthy living environment and resources to meet these needs, and assists family caregivers in monitoring the care for the client with chronic health problems.

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