

Geriatric Care Management Services

FEW PEOPLE WOULD LIKE TO THINK ABOUT NEEDING LONG-TERM CARE. OFTENTIMES, WHEN ONE IS PLANNING FOR RETIREMENT, THE POTENTIAL NEED FOR LONG-TERM CARE IS NOT A PRIORITY. HOWEVER, THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES SAYS THAT AT LEAST 70 PERCENT OF PEOPLE OVER THE AGE OF 65 WILL REQUIRE SOME TYPE OF LONG-TERM CARE AND THE LIKELIHOOD OF NEEDING SUCH SERVICES WILL ONLY INCREASE WITH AGE.

Most individuals learn about long-term care when they or a loved one needs immediate care. Such critical situations create added stress for both the caregiver and the individual needing care. During this time, options are limited by a lack of information or education, a shortage of available services and/or insufficient resources to pay for the services needed or desired.

With over 60 retirement communities in Lancaster County alone, many families do not know where to begin. Planning ahead allows individuals to understand all of the options available in the local community and make an educated decision about the future rather than having someone force a decision upon them.

As the variety of services available to improve the lifestyles of the elderly has increased, retirement decisions have become more complicated. "Families and other professionals now can turn to geriatric care managers to help them navigate the complex puzzle of retirement-living resources," says Stephanie I. Thomopoulos, immediate past president of the Mid-Atlantic Chapter of the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers (NAPGCM) and owner of GeriatricCare Management, Inc.

NAPGCM defines geriatric care managers as individuals who assist

older adults and persons with disabilities in attaining their maximum functional potential. Geriatric care managers are experienced guides and resources for families of older adults and others with chronic needs, including assisting those suffering from Alzheimer's or Parkinson's diseases, or those exhibiting symptoms of dementia. NAPGCM, formed in 1985, is a volunteer, non-profit association with over 2,000 members.

Care management is still becoming recognized as "the holistic approach" to dealing with the needs of individuals and now responds to a wide range of needs, including medical, financial, physical, social, housing, family and personal. "Families are often overwhelmed with the needs of their parents or are unable to care for them due to living a distance from them. These factors and others are creating an increase in demand for the geriatric care manager," says Thomopoulos.

Common services provided by geriatric care managers include, but are not limited to:

Comprehensive Individual Assessments

Comprehensive assessments are used to help identify problems and provide solutions. These assessments often cover the physical, mental, social, legal, financial and spiritual well-being of an individual.

Preparing a Customized Care Plan

After the initial assessment, a customized care plan is prepared to outline the individual's options on short-term and long-term products and services that will help maximize his or her quality of life. These services may include those available in the home or specific recommendations for retirement communities based on the physical and financial well-being of the individual. Geriatric care managers will also take location, accommodation, availability and other important factors into consideration when preparing a plan.

While it is not required that one act upon the products or services recommended, often the suggested solutions may be ones that the individual or caregiver may not have otherwise thought about. Additionally, trusted professionals who specialize in long-term care will be recommended to assure the senior's life is maximized to its fullest potential.

Increasing Financial Health

There are grants and additional sources of income available that many individuals are simply unaware of. Geriatric care managers may help identify these additional benefits. In addition, these professionals will provide education on Medicare, Medicaid and other government benefits. Families save time and money when hiring geriatric care managers, as they identify the specific services that will best suit individuals.

Coordinating Services, Assisting with Transitions and Monitoring Care

From the initial set-up and screening of qualified services to follow-up visits, geriatric care managers can oversee the care plan from start to finish. Families, especially those caregivers from out-of-town, find peace of mind realizing that they do not have to worry about the loads of paperwork involved in setting up long-term care services, and that a professional with an unbiased perspective will be overseeing their loved one's care on a regular basis.

Nationally, geriatric care managers charge anywhere from \$50 to \$200 an hour (the fees are based on location and what services are needed). You can find geriatric care managers in your area by visiting www.caremanager.org or asking the local area agency on aging.

Nettie, a marketing representative at a local retirement community says, "It is unfortunate that seniors wait until the last minute. The search commonly begins when they are showing signs of deterioration. Often, individuals' choices are limited by a lack of planning. Usually, they are looking for something immediate or within the next three to six months. As expected, most facilities in the Lancaster area have waiting lists. Seniors may not have their expected breadth of choices in where they live out their lives. Unfortunately, many will have to go with whoever has availability. Seniors and caregivers also have no idea where to begin the search. I always feel confident giving out information regarding the services offered by our geriatric care managers, as I know they are the ones with the finger on the pulse of the Lancaster retirement communities and services available at home. It is my pleasure to offer their information and will continue to do so."

While it is often difficult for families to discuss long-term care options with their loved ones, having a third party's unbiased perspective on products and services can help to ease the minds of all parties involved.

It is essential that individuals have plans in place for themselves, as it creates a higher likelihood that they will be able to remain at home longer. It also increases the probability of relocating to the community of their choice. ❖



Jessica A. Pavelko, CSA, a lifelong Lancaster resident and senior consulting specialist, launched Pavelko Senior Consulting Services, LLC (PSCS) in 2006. The business takes a unique personal and professional interest in seniors and their

families by assisting them in making certain all of the resources are being utilized that best meet an individual's needs. PSCS acts as an advocate and navigator for seniors, and helps them and their family members make wise decisions regarding the care that they desire and deserve. For more information, contact PSCS at 717-517-8871, e-mail at info@pavelko.org or visit www.pavelko.org.