

Care Management Services: Is it Truly a Luxury Item or a Cost Effective Value for Caregivers?

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As we all begin to anticipate the holidays, more of us will also be faced with the issues of caring for a frail elder or other family member with a chronic disability. The Kaiser family foundation found in a recent study that beginning this year (2005) eldercare will become more important than child care for those of us still in the workforce. Furthermore, even those of us who have the luxury of early retirement will be facing the challenges of caring for someone with a chronic illness at a time of our lives when we expected to be a little freer from family obligations.

Family caregiving is no small task either. Public and private spending on long term care services was estimated to exceed \$127 billion in 1998. Can you imagine what that figure is today? This includes about \$35 billion of out-of-pocket expenses for individuals and families. Most of us don't live close to our aging loved ones anymore, so caregiving often means unscheduled trips and the expenses that accompany that. These costs can be compounded by the fact that once you get to your family member, you may not be able to accomplish your goals because the health and social service systems are so fragmented and difficult to access that many people walk away frustrated, or worse yet, they make costly errors that take time, expense and emotions to change.

Finally, caregiving takes a huge emotional toll. It is hard to see someone who has been vital and in charge of their life become frail and insecure, and sometimes ornery. Concerns about a parent will often lead to the re-emergence of old family conflicts and rivalries that complicate decision making about care options. Financial matters play a big part in the conflicts about how to care for a parent or other loved one, especially when heirs are depending on inheritances for their own retirements.

The stress of responsibility and grieving for the loved one can add to the sense of "burden" that many families feel when it is time to provide caregiving. These stresses come from many aspects of the losses, fears and unknowns that accompany caregiving. Whether it is concern for our own future health, the loss of the functional or cognitive abilities of the care recipient, the financial and time pressures that emerge or the expectation of more time for us, caregiving presents enormous challenges to the entire family.

It is in recognition of all of these issues that Rona Bartelstone Care Management & Home Healthcare service was founded 25 years ago. Many individuals and families need guidance in coping with family caregiving, just as you hire expert consultants to assist with financial management and planning, there was a recognition that caregiving presents many challenges that can be more efficiently and effectively addressed by having an expert advisor to lead the way.

Getting Started Is Easy

Once you determine that your family could benefit from care management services, you would have a personal consultation directly with the care management professional at Rona Bartelstone Associates. This is a paid consultation during which you will have the opportunity to discuss your concerns about your loved one's needs. It will also be a time for you to share information about your loved one and to develop a strategy for presenting the program to the care recipient. Because older adults are often unfamiliar with care management services, Rona Bartelstone Associates strongly recommend that you take the opportunity to discuss the program with them prior to presenting the idea to the potential care recipient.

Next Steps

Once you have provided the information that the care manager will need and discussed your own concerns, Rona Bartelstone Associates will arrange for an on-site assessment of the needs of the care recipient(s). This visit by the care manager with the care recipient assures that a professional and objective assessment of the situation is made prior to recommending services that address care needs. The care manager will be a highly trained and experienced professional from a health or human service background such as, social work, nursing, gerontology or rehabilitation. The assessment will be conducted in a conversational manner, so as not to alienate the care recipient. However, the assessment will be a very thorough review of health issues, medications, nutrition and hydration, social and emotional needs, environmental concerns, especially as they related to safety and the stated preferences of the family and care recipient.

Once the care manager has completed the initial visit and based upon the input of the family and the care recipient(s), s/he will recommend a plan of care that is consistent with available resources, preferences and lifestyle of the individual(s). This plan will be incremental to avoid overwhelming the care recipient. In many cases, it is necessary to work on establishing a trusting relationship with the care recipient prior to the implementation of specific services. However, during the relationship building stage, the care manager will be monitoring the cognitive and functional abilities of the care recipient to assure that we are promoting the independence and dignity of each individual.

Providing Care

Once a plan of care has been recommended, the care manager from Rona Bartelstone Associates can stay involved to implement the plan on behalf of the family, or simply act as a guide

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for those families who wish to manage implementation. For those families who cannot implement the plan, the Rona Bartelstone Associates care manager will keep the family closely informed about the progress of service implementation, concerns and future needs. Since each family's needs are unique the plan is customized to fit the individual situation.

Depending upon the complexity of the situation, the initiation of the caring relationship and the implementation of the basic services, usually take less than ten hours of time. Once the situation is more stable, the care manager typically spends about two and a half hours per month in monitoring the care needs, assuring the delivery of health care, monitoring in-home staff and providing emotional support. With fees for care management services ranging from \$110.00 - 200.00 per hour (depending on the part of the country), this becomes a very reasonable service, especially for families that need to miss work and travel to provide caregiving. Typically, on-going quality assurance, supervision and advocacy take about 2 hours per month after the situation is stabilized.

Other Benefits

Care Management has other benefits for both the care recipient and the family. The care recipient is likely to receive services that are more appropriate and better coordinated, so that they can be used to their maximum benefit. The family also will have more peace of mind knowing that the best services are in place.

Additionally, the care manager can help to avoid abuse, exploitation or neglect by providing oversight to the caregiver. Even a family caregiver can sometimes become lax in care provision, when the care needs go on for many years. This is usually done out of exhaustion and burnout rather than any malicious intent. Paid caregivers sometimes ingratiate themselves to a care recipient and begin to take advantage of the gratitude and relationship. This can be monitored and limited if a care manager is involved.

Medication management and safety issues can be addressed proactively and sometimes forestall life threatening crises. We know that falls are the number one cause of fatalities in older adults. While all falls cannot be prevented, it is possible to limit the risk of falls with proper equipment and supervision in the home. The care manager

can assure that risks are minimized.

Medication mismanagement is sometimes a cause of falls or other unrelated health problems, like confusion or dehydration. The care manager can assure that an appropriate health professional is overseeing the administration of medications. This can be done by having a nurse fill medication boxes on a regular basis. The nurse can also do a review of medications to limit the likelihood of interactions that cause additional disability. This is a tremendous problem with people who are managing their own medications, especially when there are many doctors prescribing and they may not communicate with one another often enough. This is also a problem for individuals with cognitive losses who can easily be confused if medication routines change on a regular basis.

Care managers can also assist with placements into assisted living facilities or skilled nursing facilities when that is the appropriate or necessary option for an individual. Placement into the wrong facility can cause tremendous emotional trauma and is very expensive. Families tend to shop the real estate aspects of care facilities instead of the quality and continuity of care. Because the care manager is in the facilities in our communities, we are aware of the best provider for the immediate and long term care of each individual. The care manager can also assure a smooth transition into the facility and help with the emotional and social adjustment to the new environment.

Throughout the relationship the care manager will keep the family informed of the needs of the care recipient. Families always remain in charge of care decisions recommended by the care manager, so there is a team approach to the provision of services. This facilitates healthy coping and provides peace of mind to the family members.

The Value Proposition

Even if you are concerned about fees, the care manager is able to be more efficient in actually arranging for needed services than family members alone. This saves time, travel and extensive out of pocket costs for long distance family members. If you value your time and lost wages along with these direct costs, it becomes apparent that families are using precious resources wisely in hiring care managers.