



Geriatric Care Managers: When You Need an Insider

Sue has no map for this part. Her mom, now 74, has lived in her own apartment for nine years. She hasn't been eating much lately and last month she fell. Everything was okay this time, but Sue is afraid for her mom's safety and unsure how to talk with her about the changes she sees.

As we and our loved ones age, the choices often become more complex than we can manage alone.

Sue and her mom don't have to navigate these difficult decisions on their own. A Geriatric Care Manager (GCM) can help. Professional GCMs are usually gerontologists, social workers, nurses or counselors who have specialized in aging and elder care issues. According to *BusinessWeek's* Susan Garland, "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."

GCMs usually begin with a face-to-face interview to assess the senior's situation, asking questions about everyday activities, nutrition, health, memory, safety and finances: What can you do for yourself? What part can family members play? What gaps in services need to be addressed? The GCM uses this information to create a care plan that helps families prioritize what services are needed. Next they help arrange for these services. Finally, they provide regular reassessments and change the care plan when necessary.

"Geriatric care managers are uniquely connected in the community," says the online resource *SeniorMag*. "It's not like hiring your sister. Most geriatric care managers have been around for awhile, know the right people, and know how to get things done."

According to *Consumer Reports*, the cost of an initial assessment ranges from \$300 to \$800. Subsequent hour-long sessions cost \$100 to \$150. Fees are generally billed privately on a fee-for-service basis. These are not covered by Medicaid, Medicare or by most health insurance policies. However, overall costs are often more contained when using a GCM, because you avoid

inappropriate placements, duplication of services and gain crisis intervention that helps avoid hospitalization.

To find a GCM by city or state, visit www.caremanager.org. Also check with health professionals, elder law attorneys and others who serve seniors for a list of local referrals.

When you hire a GCM, ask about their professional certification, if they are available for emergencies, how they will communicate information to you, and if they have an area of expertise. Some have excellent contacts and tools for issues of memory loss, while others have more information about recovery after surgery. Ask for referrals and talk with other people who have used this person's services. A good GCM will assess current needs *and* anticipate future ones.

A GCM can take much of the pressure off family members to have all the answers. Ironically, many elders may share more with a GCM than they do with their own kin, because they may be embarrassed by changes in their health or may not want to worry their children. GCMs can be especially valuable for long distance caregivers. Not only can they assess and set up needed services, geriatric care managers can monitor the senior, keep distant caregivers informed, and be a local advocate with insider contacts and status.

For more information about hiring a GCM, visit the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers at www.caremanager.org or call 520-881-8008.

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