

The Family Caregiver Newsletter



“There are only four kinds of people in the world – those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers, those who will be caregivers and those who will need caregivers.”
~ Rosalynn Carter

Whether you are in the midst of caring for a loved one or are concerned about an older adult, becoming a caregiver is generally a role that presents itself when you least expect it. As a result, I always encourage individuals and families to begin thinking ahead and become familiar with a relative’s recent diagnosis or pre-existing condition. This issue will focus on a few ways you can be proactive, resources that can help make your responsibilities easier and steps to take if you are worried about a loved one.

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New Caregiver Group in NJ and NY

A new educational and supportive group for family caregivers called *Enhancing Your Life As A Caregiver* is now meeting in New Jersey and will soon be meeting in New York.

Facilitated by Christine M. Valentin, LCSW – a geriatric clinical social worker – the group focuses on reducing caregiver-related stress by providing education and support to individuals concerned about an older adult, spouse, friend, neighbor etc.

Meetings in New York will take place in Midtown Manhattan, courtesy of space provided by [CarePlanners](#) – a company that gives patients and caregivers better decision-making tools as they navigate the healthcare system with one-on-one support. Meetings in New Jersey occur in Downtown Summit.

To learn more about upcoming meetings or to join the group, click [here](#).

HOW CAN I PLAN AHEAD?

I'm interested in learning how I can plan ahead. My 85-year-old father lives out-of-state and while he doesn't need any help now, I'd like to learn if there are any steps I can take in order to be prepared if and when he needs assistance. ~ Mr. S



Dear Mr. S,

There definitely are steps you can take to better prepare yourself. Below, are a few things you can do beforehand in order to reduce the stress of scrambling around during the last minute for information.

FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH DAD'S HEALTH INSURANCE

One of the most common questions caregivers are asked when trying to obtain services for their loved one is, "What type of insurance does your loved one have?" Unfortunately, many caregivers either do not know what type of insurance their relative has or make the wrong assumptions about their health coverage, which can lead to obtaining misinformation. Therefore, the more you can find out about your father's insurance the better. At the very least, you want to know who his primary and secondary carrier is, as well as whether he has a long-term care insurance policy.

LEARN ABOUT GENERAL RESOURCES IN HIS AREA

The next step is to inquire about resources available in your father's community. Services like transportation, home-delivered meals, in-home assistance, etc., can prove beneficial to assisting your father should his health decline. When inquiring about such services, besides finding out what's available, you should also ask about eligibility requirements and the application process. Learning about such factors can help generate a better idea of what will be available to your father.

KNOW HIS MEDICAL TEAM AND SOCIAL CIRCLES

You also want to know who to contact should an emergency arise with your father. Contact information for his doctor(s), friends, neighbors and anyone else your father interacts with frequently can help save you a lot of anguish should you need to reach out for assistance during an emergency. This is especially important if you live out-of-state and need someone to pitch in until you can get to your dad.

Lastly, you may also find it helpful to read about steps you can take if you begin to notice changes in your father. Page 4 has an excerpt of one of my blogs entitled, "I Am Worried About My Loved One," which may be helpful.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Having to navigate the internet to search for caregiver assistance can quickly become overwhelming when your search results in numerous pages of web sites. Below are a few online resources that can help guide you towards more assistance or answer some of your caregiver-related questions.

AGENCY ON AGING

www.eldercare.gov

Agencies on Aging (AAA) are a great resource for learning about available services like transportation, Meals-on-Wheels, financial assistance, etc., in your loved one's community. The elder care locator website can provide you with AAA's contact information as well as other helpful resources.

MEDICARE

www.medicare.gov

Besides learning about Medicare, this government website can help you find local physicians, certified home health agencies and prescription drug plans. This website also lists ratings for nursing homes, which can be helpful for those families searching for a nursing home. A nursing home checklist is also available.

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF ELDER LAW ATTORNEYS (NAELA)

www.naela.org

An elder law attorney is generally used by families who wish to protect their loved one's financial assets while also optimizing long-term care options. This website contains a directory of elder care attorneys across the nation who can be of such assistance.

LAWHELP

www.lawhelp.org

If you are in need of legal assistance, this website provides information about free or low-cost legal assistance programs in various communities. Information about legal and housing rights, public benefits, etc., can also be obtained. Information can be found by clicking on the state you wish to learn more about.

ASSISTED LIVING FEDERATION OF AMERICA (ALFA)

www.alfa.org

If you are looking for an assisted living facility for your loved one, ALFA provides a list of senior living communities across the country which can be narrowed down by zip code. A check list for touring facilities is also available and is found on the bottom of the main page.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GERIATRIC CARE MANAGERS

www.caremanager.org

Geriatric care managers are a great resource for families who live far away, need assistance with applying for benefits, or want to learn about various resources. A geriatric care manager can also assist families with such tasks by doing most of the research and "legwork" often required.



I AM WORRIED ABOUT MY LOVED ONE



~ An excerpt from The Family Caregiver Blog by Christine M. Valentin

There generally comes a time for many individuals when they realize their loved one's health is declining and they may need assistance. During this time, family members are often left feeling unsure about how to proceed. Below are a few recommendations on what to do if you find yourself in such a situation.

Talk with your loved one

Try to discuss your concerns with the person you are worried about. It may help to start by saying something like "Mom, is everything okay? I've noticed you seem a bit more _____ (stressed, on edge, unlike yourself, etc.)" Refrain from using negative words like "short-tempered, confused, forgetful, or paranoid" as it can help prevent a defensive response.

Attend a Doctor's appointment

If your loved one acknowledges a problem, inquire about upcoming doctor's appointments and offer to go as a means of support. Two sets of "ears" are usually better than one. Remember to bring along a notebook and a pen so that you can write down any important information the doctor relays.

Learn About the Diagnosis

If a diagnosis is issued, take the information home with you and do some research. The more you learn about an illness or disease, the better prepared you can be for any potential medical and behavioral issues that can arise; it will also help when making long-term care decisions. Last but not least, share what you have learned with your loved one, family and any other involved individuals.

In the event your loved one denies needing any assistance, consider utilizing these approaches.

Talk with friends, neighbors and/or other relatives

Bringing up your concern with other relatives, a close friend or even neighbors who interact frequently with your loved one can help you gain further insight into what's going on with your relative. Never underestimate how helpful any piece of information you gather can be.

Reach out to your loved one's physician

Contact your loved one's physician to relay your concern. If you've had a past relationship with your loved one's doctor, a direct phone call may be all that is needed. If you don't have a prior relationship, however, confidentiality regulations can prevent the doctor from speaking with you. If so, consider writing a letter explaining why you are concerned, what you are noticing and how it is different from past behavior. At the very least, you will be notifying the physician and hopefully contributing to a more thorough evaluation next time your relative visits.

Plan an unannounced visit

An unexpected visit can be a great way of obtaining a glimpse of what is going on when you're not around. Understanding your loved one's daily routine like what they do throughout the day, what they eat and how often they take their medications can prove helpful; it can also help explain any "strange" behaviors you are noticing. Daily phone calls can also help if visiting is not an option. During these calls, ask open-ended questions like, "What did you do today?" "What did you have for lunch?" or "Do you have anything planned for this week?" Doing so can allow more room for discussion which can lead to a better understanding of your relative's well-being.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sunday, April 22 5:30pm – Summit, NJ
Enhancing Your Life As A Caregiver – Part 1

Family caregivers are encouraged to join us for this casual meeting where Christine M. Valentin, a geriatric clinical social worker will answer caregiver-related questions and allow attendees to share their frustration, knowledge and tips. This is the first part of four meetings where the focus will be on reducing stress for the caregiver.

Thursday, May 24 6:00 pm – Summit, NJ
Enhancing Your Life As A Caregiver – Part 2

Guest speaker Adam A. Berry, a certified Yoga and Tai Chi instructor, will educate family caregivers how techniques like Yoga and Tai chi can reduce stress and easily be incorporated into our daily routine.

Wednesday, May 30 6:00 pm – New York
Caregiving 101

Everyone is welcomed to attend this meeting to learn who exactly is a caregiver, what individuals can expect during their caregiving journey, and how to minimize stress and maximize strength. This meeting will be held in NYC and facilitated by Christine M. Valentin, LCSW.

To attend any one of these meetings, please visit www.meetup.com/familycaregivergroup or e-mail Christine.m.valentin@gmail.com for more information.



Thank you for reading this issue of The Family Caregiver Newsletter.

If you have a caregiver-related question you would like to ask, feel free to e-mail your question to christine.m.valentin@gmail.com.

To stay up-to-date on the latest caregiver-related news be sure to visit my [Facebook](#) page, follow me on [Twitter](#) or sign up for my [Blog](#).

For practical advice or counseling, you can contact Christine at (347) 565-4179.

About the Editor:

Christine M. Valentin is a licensed clinical social worker in the states of New York and New Jersey. Ms. Valentin has worked with older adults for six years and started her private practice in January 2010. Through education and support, Ms. Valentin assists family caregivers balance everyday responsibilities with their caregiving role. She offers evening and weekend appointments and also speaks Spanish. If you would like more information about the services she provides, please visit www.familycaregiversocialworker.com