

Care Management Supports Independence of Older Adults

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For me, Care Management is about meeting people where they are, meeting them in perhaps a vulnerable place and shedding light on a difficult situation to ease the transition back into wellbeing. Care management is overseeing the client's care in order to maintain independence and ensure safety while providing a quality of life consistent with the individual's goals and dreams.

Often times as care managers, our first call is from a family member such as a spouse or an adult child upon the realization the family can no longer meet the loved one's needs alone. Extra hands, eyes and ears are needed to oversee care, including attending doctor appointments and care conferences to advocate for and ensure that correct information is relayed as well as received. It is not uncommon for the client to initially resist help, finding it difficult to admit the need or reluctant to ask for help. So that first meeting can easily be intimidating for the client. Respect and dignity are key ingredients in building a relationship of mutual trust and understanding.

Care management should never be *we versus them*, family and nurse against the loved one. The client's goals become my goals, keeping the quality of life meaningful while balancing safety and risk. Safety must always be part of the equation. One client told me she clearly did not need or want my services, but because it might be helpful to her daughter, she agreed to my involvement in her care, but not too frequently! Over time, a very special bond was formed between us, based on mutual trust, great admiration, respect and love. She knew that I had her back; her goals were my goals.

Change can be threatening and is often met with great resistance. Introducing durable medical equipment such as lift chair, rolling walkers, gait belt, stair lift, portable bedrail, or shower chair can be viewed as a loss of independence. While that may be the client's (or family members') perception, use of such equipment may actually increase independence and quality of life. Care managers must think outside the box. Individualizing the introduction of such resources most probably will result in successful use and greatly improved the client's quality of life.

One particular client had a rare disorder causing an acute and rapid decline in her mobility. Within a very short period of time she became immobile, restricted to a wheelchair. She had great determination to do things on her terms to maintain whatever ability she did have. In addition to respecting her determination, it was imperative to have the continued support of her family. The client's care situation called for an electric bed with separate controls for height, head and foot maneuverability. However, replacing her bed was particularly upsetting for her as its ornate headboard held special memories. The situation called for creativity, compassion and patience. Respecting and understanding the importance of her beautiful wooden headboard, an electric bed was found that accommodated it.

Similarly, the introduction of a wheelchair can also be met with resistance as it is often viewed as a symbol of lost independence even though it allows for increased mobility and comfort. Whether care managers or family members, we must be empathetic and compassionate and consider the impact these changes in client's care regimens may have for the individual. Every small step made to maintain independence and safety is a huge victory for client, family and care manager alike.

Meals on Wheels, church programs such as Parish Health Ministry and other volunteer support systems should be considered and incorporated whenever possible. Pet Therapy organizations such as Canines for Christ are also life enriching and beneficial resources. Nico, one such canine companion, was a huge bright spot for some of my clients, bringing smiles, laughter and a happy diversion, even winning over those who were not overly fond of dogs!

Non-skilled or in-home care can sometimes be perceived as a sense of loss even though it brings added benefit to the quality of life allowing more time for enjoyable outings and peace of mind to family. Other areas of consideration for resources should include an evaluation for skilled care such as physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy to reach the optimal level of mobility and independence possible. Such therapists are great resources, well worth their weight in gold for their critical thinking and expertise outlining safe practices and care regimens.

Creative care management involves knowing how to pull the resources together at the right time over the confines of the illness to fulfill the goal of staying at home safely while maintaining dignity and quality of life. I am blessed to have such wonderful clients whom I greatly respect and admire.

For more information on Care Management, contact Peggy Slade-Sowders at ERS Living Well Senior Solutions at (513) 561-0222.