



January 2012

What To Do When: “My Parents Refuse Help!”

How can two very well educated adults, who made good choices all their lives, not have made plans for their failing health?

This is the theme of three calls that I received in the recent past from adult children with aging parents in their 80's. It only takes one trip to the hospital for one of the parents to open up Pandora's Box and turn their own lives, as well as those of their adult children, upside down.

The issue that has come up for these three families is that the parent who is seen as the “well parent” actually has a cognitive impairment due to dementia or other mental health issue. One is driving and getting lost looking for his wife who used to drive. Another sits in the garage all day because she doesn't like the caregiver. A third is on the phone all day looking for “free” opinions – any one of which could take advantage of her frailty through poor advice or a possible scam.

Family members are often in denial about the “well” spouse or parent's impairments. This is because the elder seems well and socially appropriate in his or her own environment.

A major change in the health of the “well” parent will exacerbate the deficits of his or her spouse who is now more alone. So, when the adult children come to town or observe a problem, they will see everything that the now ill parent has covered up and the extent to which the newly alone parent is impaired. This is a shock for some and causes extreme stress and confusion to all the family members.

This situation can also bring up conflicts among siblings, some long standing issues or as a part of experiencing their parents differently



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all their lives. Some want to step in and take over and others, in trying to “respect their wishes”, just want to let the parents have their lives without making any changes for their safety or welfare.

In all three of the calls I received, I was able to consult with the children and give them some priorities and steps to take. In each situation, I had no history with these elders and my recommendations were based on my 30 years as a Geriatric Care Manager – experience and knowledge of resources was what I brought to help each family. Every couple or elder and their family will need a different plan or approach. Therein lies the art of this professional work.

With one family's at-risk parent who was now driving, the first step was to work on disabling the car and then having him assessed by a Neuropsychologist. The results would be concrete and give them either a diagnosis or lead to further testing. But at least they would have the medical diagnoses necessary to take over as the decision makers while the “well” parent is ill.

The parent whose cognitive stress was causing her to make endless calls, putting her at risk for scams or financial abuse, also needed the help of a professional who was not a family member. She would not take any direction from the children, but

would willingly work with the “nice man” – a male Care Manager. Because she was used to high touch services of maids and housekeepers, it was much easier for the family and for us to suggest a “personal assistant” (not caregiver) while her husband was in the hospital. Since he was going on hospice she would soon need full-time care and this was a good way to ease into the plan of care for her.

My advice to the overwhelmed family or adult child is not to try to solve it all by yourself – your own health, career and family could be negatively affected if you don't get on the right path. Bring in a consultant who is certified as a Professional Care Manager and has experience with aging parents (couples) who have challenges related to their failing health or cognitive abilities. Having a list of priorities instead of fretting about some of the smaller issues is a stress reliever. Having direction and good referrals for the next steps will be a time saver and, in the end, this advice is frequently a cost saver.

Balance should be our motto when caring for the seniors in our lives. Yes, your parents didn't plan for this slippery ride but you don't have to go down the slide. Get advice, take care of yourself – and for the best quality of life possible for everyone.

Eldercare Services provides Counseling, Support Groups, Home Care and Care Management to aid Family Caregivers. If you or someone you know could benefit from self-care, give us a call at (866) 760-1808 or email us at Info@EldercareAnswers.com.

Eldercare Services works with Seniors and their families in Walnut Creek, Alameda County, San Francisco, Marin County and the Tri-Valley, CA.

Visit us on the web at www.EldercareAnswers.com for more information.

Community Classes

Walnut Creek

Dementia: 101

For Families Experiencing the Challenge

3rd Friday of every month from 10 AM to Noon

1808 Tice Valley Blvd., Walnut Creek, CA 94595

Cost for Classes: None

Class Registration:

Please call at least 3 days ahead

For more information regarding classes and support groups, visit us at www.EldercareAnswers.com or call (925) 937-2018 or email us at Info@EldercareAnswers.com

Support Groups

When concerns for aging family members are part of every day life, or when they interfere with work, your health or other relationships, you need to join a support group.

Caring for An Aging Family Member

2nd Thursday of every month from 7 to 8:30 PM

1808 Tice Valley Blvd., Walnut Creek, CA 94595

1st Tuesday of every month from 6 to 7:30 PM

605 A Chenery St., San Francisco, CA 94131

Cost for Support Groups: None

Support Group Registration: Not required

More Info: (925) 937-2018 or (415) 469-8300



*Eldercare
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Advocacy, Care, and Education

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