



December 2012

“The Circle of Life”: Continuity within the Continuum of Care

The Disney movie *The Lion King* has a major theme, “The Circle of Life”. We are born, we live a full life and then we die – or maybe that’s just the way it is in the jungle. But, for many of our parents, or for us – the last thread in the circle can either be one of dignity or one of despair and frustration.



Linda Fodrini-Johnson, MA, MFT, CMC, is the Founder and Executive Director of Eldercare Services and is a Fellow and a Past President of the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care

As I reflect on the year past, I am reminded of the impact we professional Geriatric Care Managers, as well as our caregivers, have on the lives of the clients we serve. I am aware of how, without our advocacy, neither the elders for whom we care, nor their families would have experienced as peaceful a transition through the Continuum of Care, eventually passing from this life.

I have read countless notes of gratitude from the families we have assisted. We have helped them move to be closer to family and/or we created stories for families to use in order to help move someone with a dementia to a safe setting where their dementia could be experienced with care, dignity and respect for them and for their families. Many notes expressed appreciation for help like advocacy that allowed a dad to have the life he wanted to the very end of his 95 years – in his home with his beloved dog and garden.

I think of my own 90 year old mother, who had about a dozen trips to the emergency room and several hospitalizations early this year. These visits only complicated her care through changes in medications and differing medical opinions. Since she has been on Hospice, we don’t have those trips to the hospital. Her symptoms are managed by the hospice team and the care provider at the home in which she resides.

The advocacy I have been able to provide due to my many years with others’ parents, took her out of the Skilled Nursing facility where she could not get the attention she now gets in the small residential care setting. She was not always dressed in skilled care, but now

every day she is dressed, with makeup on, bright red hair neatly combed - and always a smile. When I visit, I join her for coffee and cookies and a sing-a-long. I wish everyone who is nearing the end of their life could have what my mother has – dignity, respect, just the right amount of care, medication and attention (all issues for which I needed to use all my expertise and experience).

I reflect on a client that came to me over 8 years ago when he and his spouse lived in their own lovely home filled with art and treasures from all over the globe. They were in their late 80’s and concerned that if one of the partners died, who would advocate for the remaining partner? Well, the younger one died first without any one-on-one care – just a sudden illness. The surviving spouse continued with Professional Care Management so advocacy could be provided when it was needed. When there was a sudden turn of events that caused an admission into “intensive care,” only comfort measures would be taken had there not been an advocate to speak up for the quality of life this individual had recently experienced.

We advocated for this client and provided caregivers in the home until the recovery allowed for almost full independence – then keeping only one care provider two days a week for errands and companionship. Later, with guidance, we were able to facilitate selling the home and a move to a lovely assisted living setting. Over these past years, this client has had periods with lots of care and advocacy and periods of just two hours of personal assisting

once a week. The continuity of care and the knowledge of what works and doesn’t work allowed the client to have a life he never dreamed he would have in his late 90’s. He called just a few days ago to thank me and to tell me that he does not think he would be alive without the care that Eldercare Services delivers.

It is the “right type and amount of care” at the right time that allows the Circle of Life to be completed with dignity, not despair. Expertise does matter. When you want care and advocacy, ask good questions about who is delivering the services.

To make “Continuum of Care” work, two of the key ingredients that help make all of this happen are:

- Teamwork – no one can do it all, but working together makes things better.
- Expertise – in the case of Eldercare Services, we have a broad range of expertise (Certified Care Managers and Caregivers with varying backgrounds) in order to bring the best possible results.

As we move into a new year, it has been our honor to be completing our 23rd year of providing the “Continuum of Care” necessary for full lives with less stress and frustration and more peace and joy.

May peace be your gift this holiday season! Don’t hesitate to call for advice or support at any time. We have skilled Professionals on duty 24 hours a day, even on Christmas and throughout the holidays.

Eldercare Services provides Counseling, Support Groups, Home Care and Care Management to aid Family Caregivers. If you or someone you know could benefit from time off or 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 & Alzheimer's 101 **For Families Experiencing the Challenge**

3rd Friday of every month from 10 AM to Noon

(continues in January)

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



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