

# In Elder Care, Geriatric Care Managers Make a Difference

By Taylor Cousens

My mom is getting older and needs help with groceries, taking her medication at the right time, following her doctor's advice. Yet, we live nearly 1,000 miles apart. I can't pop over at a moment's notice.

Mine is not an uncommon predicament. Here in northern New Jersey and all over the country, caring for elderly parents is a growing concern. Seventy-five percent of elder care falls on the shoulders of adult children and other family members and friends. Often called the "sandwich generation," this coincides with caring for our own children and being in the full swing of our careers.

It's a real conundrum, especially since an increasing number of grown children and their parents live in different states.

The challenge of caring for my mother long distance started when my father passed away. It was two weeks before my wedding. Amid the place cards and my full-time job, came a mass of paperwork. Changing billing addresses to my home, faxing death certificates, sorting through finances and health insurance.

And, figuring out how my mother, who doesn't drive, would get to her doctor appointments. With Type II diabetes, regular health monitoring is important; she has a penchant for ice cream. She's also cognitively impaired, making supervision all the more necessary.

I could move her closer to me and, then again, I couldn't. She doesn't want to move. She likes it down south, likes her home and friends, her routines. I prefer the "frozen north," and so does my own family. Two little girls and my husband, who's lived in Bergen County practically his whole life.

Not that my mother wants my help. She resents feeling that I'm "in charge" of her. And, frankly, being the head of my mother's affairs is no treat for me either.

I needed help, but there were few people to which we could turn. And fewer still who could offer the kind of regular assistance necessary. Everyone I know is as busy as I am.

I began the search for professional help. I thought I'd found an answer in the form of elderly home care agencies. They provided the kinds of services I thought I needed: home check-ins, light cleaning, transportation.

But, here's what they didn't provide: judgment. A week into working, one aide signed my mother up for a credit card, despite specific instruction not to make financial decisions. Several aides later, I realized I needed something different.

The home care aides were caring, but that wasn't nearly enough. I needed someone with discernment. Someone who could make the kinds of decisions I would, who'd know when to act and when to consult me first.

At that time, I never found anyone. Then, recently I heard an unfamiliar term: geriatric care managers. Unfamiliar with the profession, I researched it and learned that this is a different, more sophisticated kind of resource. Geriatric Care Managers (Or Elder Care Managers) generally have strong educational credentials and provide for both medical and non-medical needs. They could, for instance, make sure my mother accurately assesses her blood sugar.

I found a few geriatric care management agencies through online resources. The U.S. Department of Aging provides an elder care locator at [www.Eldercare.gov](http://www.Eldercare.gov), although it's unclear if the database includes both Home Care Aides and Geriatric Care Managers, or one of the two.

The National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers (<http://www.caremanager.org>) is a non-profit organization of geriatric care managers that acts as a governing body for members. They establish and help to maintain high ethical and practical standards of education and certification.

Advocare (<http://www.caremanage.com>) is a member of the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers as well as the Florida Association for Professional Care Managers. In their case, Advocare's [Geriatric Care Managers](#) are registered nurses and also experienced social work professionals with strong backgrounds in elderly care. They seem to provide what I never found: astute oversight and a useful knowledge of local resources. Coordinating the medical and daily care of elderly parents, they keep in close contact with families and act as a liaison between families and medical providers.

Looking through their website, a number of [client recommendation letters](#) are impressive in their length and detail. Many of them are physicians, attorneys, and the like--from all over the U.S., including our area. This isn't surprising, since Florida continues to hold its title as the retirement state.

I am heartened to find that such resources exist, because they seem to provide what I've previously lacked--the ability to make accurate, educated assessments. I wish I'd found Advocare when my mother and I needed them most.

***About the Author***

***Taylor Cousens is a writer whose interests lie in exploring socially and philosophically conscious living. She also likes horses, wry humor, and entrepreneurial initiatives. Her work has been published in print and online.***