

When to Hire a Geriatric Care Manager (And the Right Questions to Ask)

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Your elderly mother is widowed and lives alone. You're the only family member she has to care for her. Her long-time health problems have become debilitating. You know she needs help but, because you live far away, you don't know exactly what she needs or where to look for help. Someone suggests that you contact a [geriatric care manager](#). What is a care manager and how can you find a good one?

A Geriatric Care Manager (GCM) is a professional who specializes in helping older people and their families with long-term care arrangements. GCMs often have training in gerontology, nursing, social work or counseling. They also have extensive knowledge about the cost, quality and availability of services in an older person's community. GCMs can:

- Provide a comprehensive **assessment and care management plan**
- **Selection, hiring, and monitoring of in-home nurses' aides / caregivers.**
- Recommend **physicians & specialists & personally accompany senior to medical appointments.** Care Managers review the chart, confer with the doctor, ensure compliance, and update the family.
- Provide **support, advocacy, and liaison** services between **family and medical providers.**
- Handle **medication management** (RN's) - Organize & **instruct client/caregiver on proper administration.**
- **Coordinate multiple medical specialists** to minimize potential drug **interactions** and negative **side affects.**
- Provide **crisis intervention & support** – many Care Managers are available for emergencies on a 7/24 basis.
- Face to face **check ups at home or in a medical facility.** Timely phone & e-mail updates to family members.
- Ensure appropriate **hurricane planning, preparation, or evacuation.**

Choose a GCM carefully. The field of geriatric care management is relatively unregulated and many people without specialized training identify themselves as care managers, care coordinators or care advisors. Therefore, it's wise to screen candidates to ensure that you're working with a person qualified in this new profession.

- **Ask about candidates' training, education and background in care management and geriatrics.** Ask how long they've been a GCM and whether they belong to the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers or any other professional associations. Inquire about specific professional licenses and certifications.
- **A care manager's ability to be responsive is important.** Ask candidates what their average response time is to return calls from clients and their families. Have them describe their communication system: Do they use pagers, portable phones, an answering service or voice mail? Learn about their agency's size, hours and staff composition. How are after-hours emergencies handled? What are the back-up systems for covering vacations and days off? Will you and your parent work with one GCM or several?
- **Determine the scope of the practice.** A GCM provides an assessment, which is a detailed review of the client's physical, medical and mental status. It serves as the basis for a comprehensive care plan for the client. Some offer more comprehensive services, such as daily money management or home care. It's important that the practice and skill sets meet the needs of your family.
- **Investigate track record and reputation.** Look for letters of reference from previous clients. Is the GCM active in professional associations?

While there are no specific licensing requirements for a GCM, there are certification programs. Ask each candidate you interview if he or she is certified, and by whom. Fees vary depending on work setting — private practice, public agency or private non-profit agency. Get a written service agreement that outlines the fee structure and practices.

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