



ALLEGHENY GERIATRIC CONSULTANTS
LICENSED SOCIAL WORKERS FOR SENIORS
WHO NEED EXTRA SPECIAL CARE

Hiring a Geriatric Care Manager: Practical Tips for Finding, Evaluating and Selecting the Right Professional

By Paula Tchirkow, MSW, LSW, ACSW

Be aware that anyone can call himself/herself a geriatric care manager. That's why it is critical that you proceed with extreme caution when selecting a geriatric care manager (GCM) for your elderly parent. After all, what could be more important than your parent's welfare?

Because geriatric care management is a relatively new field and unregulated, there are people who call themselves GCMs without having the necessary education, experience or credentials. For example, I know a realtor who advertises that he is a GCM, because he specializes in selling the homes of older adults and helping them relocate into condominiums or senior facilities.

Make sure you have the most qualified professional who has the proper education, training, credentials, and the right personality for you and your parent. With this in mind, I have comprised a list of practical tips to help guide you through making this important decision in your life: finding the right professional to care for your elderly parent when you or your family members are not available, live at a distance or no longer can.

What should you do first?

- **Contact the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers (NPGCM) to find out what GCMs are located close to your parent's residence.** Those GCMs listed with the NAPGCM will have the proper credentials and educational background. You can contact the organization by calling 520-881-8008 or by visiting their website www.caremanager.org If there is not a GCM in your area, you can also contact your local Agency on Aging or run an ad yourself in your daily

newspaper. If you do run an ad, make sure you specify what exactly you are looking for based on the information provided in this article.

- **Plan to interview at least two or three candidates, perhaps more to determine who would be the best fit for you, your parent and the rest of your family.** To make this process easy for you, I have developed a series of questions that will help you in making this choice. If you chose another venue for finding a geriatric care manager, please keep the following in mind.

The Interview

You may want to have a list of standard questions that include the following, and assess a rating scale or point system to each interview.

Ask the person for his/her credentials and educational background.

Look for professionals who have Masters degrees in social work, nursing, psychology or related field. Some may have special expertise in, for example, Alzheimer's Disease. You may want to ask them what college or university they attended and their graduation date. You can then contact the school and find out if these individuals did indeed graduate from that school and if they have the proper education and credentials. It never hurts to be too careful.

License. Certain professional groups, such as social workers *must be licensed* in your state in order to practice legally. No matter how good the GCMs education and training may be, check and see if he/she is licensed.

Continuing Education. Because the field is new and evolving, geriatric care managers, like attorneys and certified public accountants, should participate in Continuing Education (CE) seminars and programs to keep up-to-date on what's new in the field. For example, social workers must have at least 30 CLUs/year.

Typical cases. Ask the interviewee the types of typical cases he/she has handled and to be specific. This will tell you if this GCM has handled situations similar to your parents and indicate to you, whether this person is right for you.

Ask the GCM how he/she would approach problem scenarios. How are emergencies handled? How would you monitor a home healthcare agency if you hired a caregiver? What about hospitalizations? What kinds of things would you put in place to ensure my parent's safety? How would you handle the issue of whether or not my mom should still be driving?

Request References and Testimonials. This is by far the best method to help you evaluate how others feel about this GCM's experience and work ethic. Ask this individual for references from other clients including names of professionals, such as attorneys, financial advisors and bank trust officers who may have used his services. Beware of the person who can't provide any references....a warning sign that this person may not be the right individual. Keep in mind that people love to help others. Satisfied clients are more than happy to refer a GCM who is an expert, trustworthy, reliable, knowledgeable and caring. These

references will also make you feel confident that this individual is qualified for the position.

Specialties. Does this person have any specialties? Some specialize in Alzheimer's, others may work with chronic illnesses like Parkinson's Disease, Muscular Dystrophy or the mentally challenged, to name a few. If your parent or an older relative has a specific illness, you may feel more comfortable with someone who has special experience in that area.

A Responsibility to the Client. You should know that, according to the NAPGCMs, the GCM has the responsibility to respect the older person's right to make decisions regarding his/her care. That means the GCM must attempt to involve the older person in all decisions that impact his/her life regardless of competency. That means the PGCM should encourage the older person to communicate verbally or non-verbally his wishes. If the older person can not communicate his wishes, the decisions for that person should be made by the person who has legal authority or Power of Attorney.

No Financial Interest in Institutions and Referrals. Ask the GCM if he/she has any financial ties to any healthcare agency, personal care or nursing home. If so, there could be a conflict of interest and the evaluation of your parent may not be objective. If he/she gets referral fees from professionals such as attorneys or financial advisors, he/she may not have the individuals' best interests as top priority. So make sure your GCM does not have any financial ties.

Does the GCM's personality match your parent's? Do you feel this person can establish a rapport with your parent? Has he/she generated a rapport with you? Does this person have life experiences in working with people and solving problems? Does he/she seem like a compassionate, caring person *who truly enjoys* working with older people and wanting to help them improve their condition? This is probably the most important point. Bottom line: you need to feel comfortable with this individual. This person could have all the education in the world but might just not be the right fit for your parent.

Creative thinker with a non-threatening approach. Evaluate whether this person is tactful, sincere and a creative problem solver. The best test for this will be when you provide case scenarios as indicated earlier and learn how this individual answers your questions.

What are the fees? Ask the care manager to provide a written statement concerning fees. Hiring a professional is not inexpensive, but what price can you put on your elderly parent's welfare? Selecting a care manager for your elderly parent is a good investment. The right person can evaluate and analyze all of your parent's issues and create the best solution for solving both your and your parent's concerns. A nurse's aid or a caregiver from a home care agency does not have the same educational background or credentials as a professional social worker or nurse. In addition, you should ask this person if he/she has liability insurance. What are the fees? In some states, the fees can range \$75.00-125.00/hour.

How will you know if the person you hired is right for you?

Give the relationship a fair chance to develop. Longstanding situations and patterns of behavior do not resolve overnight. Attention to quality of life issues are also important.



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