

A caring matter

Geriatric care consultants can fill the gaps. **By Ray Marano**



If you're responsible for an elderly parent who lives alone, are sure they can take care of themselves adequately?

Busy executives or business owners who are responsible for the care of an elderly parent or other relative may not be aware that their charge is unable to function completely independently, says Paula Tchirkow, owner of Allegheny Geriatric Consultants.

Tchirkow's service determines how capable clients are to live in their current circumstances and, if they are not, what steps can be taken to allow them to stay in their home or apartment. In some cases, she may recommend alternative living arrangements. Tchirkow

first does an assessment to evaluate a client's physical and emotional health, support network of family, friends and neighbors, and the physical environment, including assisting devices and accommodations available in the home. She then develops a plan of care, which may suggest the client can stay in the home with the assistance of a social service agency or special accommodations. Or, she may recommend an alternative living arrangement, such as a nursing or personal care home.

Tchirkow says the elderly may not always tell the truth about what's going on in their lives, but there are telltale signs that indicate an individual may need intervention. Mail may pile up and bills go unpaid. The individual may have noticeable weight loss. Personal grooming habits may deteriorate, and their residence may not be kept up to previous standards.

Driving accidents, falls or unsteady walking are other indications. A care manager can intervene in ways a family member may find difficult. Convincing an elderly person to give up driving or move into nursing facility, for instance, can be difficult tasks for family members, because the relationship is emotionally charged. A care manager can be perceived as a neutral party, and therefore can prove more effective in persuading them to make a change.

"Many times, I'm called in to be the bad guy," says Tchirkow.

Tchirkow suggests care managers should possess a master's degree in geriatric social work or nursing. They should not be affiliated with a nursing home, medical equipment suppliers or other care providers. And they should have adequate qualified back-up personnel. Ask for references, Tchirkow says, and a written fee schedule. How to reach: Allegheny Geriatric Consultants, (724) 449-5828.



Paula P. Tchirkow, MSW, LSW, ACSW, is President of Pittsburgh-based Allegheny Geriatric Consultants, which specializes in geriatric care management for the elderly and chronically ill middle aged adults. Paula is a frequent advisor to attorneys, physicians, financial planners and bank trust officers on elder care issues. She can be reached at 724-449-5828, www.caregivingadvice.com or Paula@caregivingadvice.com.