



# The Role of **The Professional Geriatric Care Manager** in Life Care Plans *by* STEVEN A. EARLY

**Elder Law is a specialty of law** that caters to the needs of older clients and those with disabilities. It encompasses such areas as long-term care planning; care coordination; Medicare, managed care, and payment for health care; Social Security and retirement income planning; Medicaid and other public benefits eligibility planning; planning for persons with special needs and special needs trusts; housing and residential care options, such as retirement living communities, assisted-living facilities, and nursing homes; financial and health care decision-making through the use of durable powers of attorney; health care and end-of-life decision-making through the use of advance directives; probate and

estate administration; and estate and tax planning.

Elder Law is the only area of law defined by the clients we serve rather than the areas of law in which we practice. We like to deal “holistically” with our clients in talking about long-term planning for health care and financial viability, family dynamics, health care and long-term care decisions, personal values and personal preferences. This holistic approach to Elder Law is generally referred to as Life Care Planning.

With a Life Care Plan, not only do we handle general estate planning issues and counsel clients about planning for incapacity with alternative decision making documents, but we also assist our clients

in planning for possible long-term care needs. In order to locate the appropriate type of care, coordinate private and public resources to finance the cost of care, and work to ensure our client’s right to quality care, we require the expertise of a Geriatric Care Manager.

A Geriatric Care Manager is a health and human services professional with a specialized body of knowledge and experience related to aging and elder care issues. A Professional Geriatric Care Manager (PGCM) is a geriatric care manager who is a member of the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers (PGCM) and has committed to adhering to the GCM Pledge of Ethics and Stan-

dard of Practices. The PGCM assists older adults and persons with disabilities in attaining their maximum functional potential. The PGCM strives to respect the autonomy of the individual and delivers care coordination and support services. In addition, the PGCM is an experienced guide and resource for families of older adults and others with chronic care needs.

### How can the Professional Geriatric Care Manager Help the Family?

Before making the effort to do the work yourself, step back a moment and try to determine whether you actually have a problem in which a professional geriatric care manager needs to be involved. Do you have time, inclination, and skills to manage the problems yourself? If you are not sure, ask your attorney, clergy, doctor, a social worker, your financial advisor, or a trusted friend to help you decide if an elder care expert may be helpful in this situation. Enlisting the support of other family members to consult a professional is a good way to build a consensus on the solutions. Other questions that you may wish to consider are:

- Are the problems that you or your loved ones are facing becoming larger and more complex than you can comfortably manage?
- Are other demands and responsibilities now so great that you are not able to provide the desired level of supervision and attention to your loved one's problems?

### How can the Professional Geriatric Care Manager Help the Client?

Care management services are offered in a variety of settings. Professional Geriatric Care Managers (PGCMs) can serve the needs of their clients with the following services:

- Short-term or on-going assistance for long distance caregivers or other requiring assistance.
- Personalized and compassionate services focusing on the individual's wants and needs.
- Accessibility: Care is typically available 24 hours a day; 7 days a week.
- Continuity of care management by facilitating family communication, reducing the burden on families and preventing unnecessary expenditures.
- Efficiency and flexibility based upon a client-centered approach eliminating bureaucratic constraints.
- Cost containment by avoiding inappropriate placements, duplication of services, and crisis intervention.

### Questions to Ask about the Firm's Professional Geriatric Care Manager

People calling themselves geriatric care managers have many different backgrounds. Many are licensed in their state in other fields. The professional organization (PGCM) recognizes the following certifica-

tions as being a "Certified Care Manager": CMC, CCM, C-ASWCM and C-SWCM. These all require testing, continuing education and experience in geriatrics. Some of these include:

- Are you a member of the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers?
- Are you certified as a care manager? Do you hold other professional licenses or certifications?
- How long have you been providing care management service?
- Are you available for emergencies?
- Does your company also provide home care services?
- How will you communicate information to me?
- Can you provide me with references?

Care managers who primarily work with older adults bring more to their practice than an expertise in geriatrics. They bring knowledge of aging issues that allow them and their staff to overcome the myths relating to aging and to focus on the problems at hand. At the same time, they will bring an experience of working with resources in your community. They are more aware of real life problems, health and otherwise, that emerge as persons age and what tools are available to address them.

Working together for the benefit of our client, the attorney and the Professional Geriatric Care Manager offer a wealth of knowledge, compassion, and care to the client and family. mt



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