

Recently, *The Atlantic* magazine featured an article entitled “Surviving A Father’s Decline” in which the writer chronicles the degeneration of his aging father’s health. In the article, he describes his own somewhat sudden realization of how the eclipse of his father’s independence could turn both of their lives into chaos.

“His elderly father insisted that he could manage by himself. But he couldn’t. The author found himself utterly unprepared for one of life’s near certainties – the decline of a parent. Millions of middle-aged Americans, he discovered, are silently struggling to cope with a crisis that needs to be plucked from the realm of the personal and brought into full public view” reads the subheading to the article.

Clearly, we all expect to experience changes in ourselves as we age. We expect to need a different prescription for our glasses, we realize it’s not so easy to remember a phone number, we are less inclined to so quickly reach for a dropped nickel; we aren’t shocked when a doctor mentions weight gain, increased cholesterol levels, or higher blood pressure.

What catch so many of us by surprise are the changes in our parents and their seemingly sudden need for help. The usual situation is ultimately a frantic scramble to come to terms with reality, to figure out a plan, to find the needed resources; to persuade a parent what is needed.

So few people realize how a geriatric care manager can help, partly because so few are willing to think about the inevitability of a parent’s demise, never mind talk about it. Such a care manager recently described how an adult child explained his situation: “I am 50 years old and I manage a national company. I spend my day making decisions about other people’s lives and telling them what to do. Now it comes to my parents and I don’t have a clue.” The case manager made a list and told him to come back in



Caring for Elderly Parents

By Leah Chandler, RN, BSN, CCM

one week. When he came back, he was a different person: his parents had living wills in place and a durable power of attorney, he had evaluated their finances and seen an elder care attorney. He had made appointments with each of his parent’s doctors, and at the care manager’s suggestion, he had contacted a local agency to spend a few hours each morning getting his parents set for the day. He felt less overwhelmed, was comfortable with the steps he had taken and was ready to move on to the next phase of completing a care plan.

The National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers defines geriatric care managers as “[specialists who help families care for older relatives, trained and experienced in several fields related to care management, such as nursing, gerontology, social work, or psychology, with a specialized focus on issues related to aging and elder care and assisting older adults and persons with disabilities in attaining their maximum functional potential.]” More information about Geriatric Care Managers can be found by visiting www.caremanager.org.

Geriatric Care Management at the VNA of Manchester and Southern NH focuses on Senior Life Planning which can help prevent a crisis and can provide the kind of confidence to adult children which helps them realize how well they can care for their parents without sacrificing their jobs, family time, or their own health.

Choose a geriatric case manager who wants to involve parents while they are still able to make their wishes clear and take part in the decision-making process. It is the best possible way to begin the planning: creative, collaborative problem-solving is more promising; expectations are more realistic, and the decisions are more easily understood and embraced.

If you are having trouble caring for someone you love, perhaps now is the time to contact the Visiting Nurse Association of Manchester

and Southern New Hampshire. Building a relationship with a geriatric care manager is one of the best investments you can make in your loved ones’ futures, your family’s, and your own.

You can find the entire article, “Surviving A Father’s Decline” by Jonathan Ranch, in *The Atlantic*, April 2010 issue, pg. 54 or visit: <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/03/letting-go-of-my-father/8001/>.

More information about caregiving can also be found at www.caregiver.org and www.caregiving.org or visit the VNA caregiving blog at www.vnamanchesternh.com.

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