

November is National Family Caregiver Month

Care Managers: A Valuable Resource for Family Caregivers

By Leslie May-Chibani

A Minuteman Senior Services skilled and experienced Care Manager can be a stabilizing force during times of crisis and transition. Imagine that someone you love has experienced a health crisis that changes their ability to accomplish basic daily living activities or makes the home no longer a safe or convenient place to live. Coping with increased doctors appointments, medications and the lifestyle changes often required can be overwhelming and stressful, as few of us are prepared to adapt to these changing circumstances. Difficult conversations may be needed among family and friends and decisions made to support a better future.

Most people begin their journey alone and try to work their way through the maze of private and government services making a lot of phone calls, internet searches leading to dead ends, and a lot of time spent just getting oriented to this new landscape. It can be very confusing and time consuming.

An experienced guide to help navigate these systems of care is invaluable, especially when family resources are needed to deal with the emotional aspect of the loss and the changing prospect of future care needs and responsibilities. Care Managers can save a family a lot of time because they know the existing community resources and will create a plan of action to focus the families' energy and efforts expediting necessary changes.

What does a Care Manager do?

Care Managers begin by having a lengthy discussion with both the person needing assistance and the family to learn about what is important, especially quality of life preferences. Releases are obtained so that physicians can be contacted to review medical history (including current medications), financial information is reviewed to determine eligibility for government funded programs, and insurance information is reviewed to know what benefits are covered – all to establish a comprehensive understanding of the person's needs and resources. At this point a care plan with recommendations for the family to consider is created and discussed. Care options are an important part of the plan, allowing the family to weigh alternatives and be a real partner in the process.

Building a care team is essential to optimizing health and preventing further decline, as well as maximizing the inner resources of the family caring for their loved one. A Care Manager can help identify family and friends that might be able to help, augmenting the gaps with professionally vetted services, and creating a workload that is healthy and manageable for everyone. Care Managers can assist with medication management, medical appointments and transitions from hospital or another facility to home. They can help with relocation and/or home organization, serve as a liaison to health and social service providers, and communicate with family members near or far. It is important to continually evaluate the care plan and the care team to ensure that it meets the needs of the entire family. A Care Manager can monitor the situation and look down the road a bit, modifying the plan and adding members to the team as needed, in order to avoid a crisis whenever possible.

Frequently, caregivers wait until they are heavily stressed and depleted (sometimes to the point of their own health decline) before acknowledging that the workload is too great, instead of putting in adequate

supports at the start. If you think of a bridge and how many supports are needed to carry the weight safely, no one would cross a bridge with only one support or even inadequate support. It is very dangerous! Adequate supports strengthen families, often allowing the loved one to remain in the community longer and healthier.

Skill and experience vary among the many professionals offering care management services. It is important to ask about the Care Manager's expertise: do they know the area and the community resources, what license does the Care Manager have, how long have they been practicing, what range of tasks will they provide, what if any financial incentives do they have with any other agencies, and what is their availability after business hours?

Help is just a phone call away.

Minuteman Senior Services is your local Area Agency on Aging, and offers over 20 different programs, including free information and referral to resources both local and long-distance.

The Family Caregiver Support Program is a taxpayer-supported, free service provided locally through Minuteman Senior Services to assist with resource information, emotional support, and a short term action plan with referrals to other services to help family caregivers better manage their needs. Minuteman Senior Services has worked with hundreds of family members who are caring for an aging parent, an ill spouse, a grandparent caring for a grandchild when the parents are no longer able to, or other family situations.

The evidence-based "Powerful Tools for Caregivers" workshop is a free, six week educational program that gives caregivers the opportunity to focus on themselves, come together with other caregivers who understand the difficulties faced in caring for a loved one over a long period of time, and begin to build the skills necessary to not only survive this caregiving situation but learn how to thrive. Minuteman Senior Services and the Lexington Council on Aging are joining together to offer this class at the Lexington Senior Center beginning on Tuesday, January 20 through February 24, from 9:00 to 10:30. To register please call 781-860-7084.

Minuteman Senior Services now offers a care management option for seniors, disabled adults of all ages and caregivers. Some people may qualify for subsidized care management and others may access care management on a fee basis through our newest program, Minuteman By Your Side. We bring our 40 years of experience in serving your community to you and your family. Asking for assistance can be difficult but as you work your way over that hurdle know that there are many supports available that you can use to strengthen your situation and your own health.



Leslie May-Chibani, Assistant Director of Minuteman Senior Services, has over 15 years of experience working with seniors and their family caregivers of all ages. Call her directly at 781-221-7096 for more information about Minuteman's new program, Minuteman By Your Side. Please visit www.minutemansenior.org for information about all the programs available.