

Trends in Health Care: A Daughter's Discovery

Margaret Freund, Director of Community Relations
LifeHOUSE, Whispering Woods

"Honey, just promise me that you won't let us be a burden on you and your family someday! We don't want you to have to take care of us. We are putting away some money and we purchased Long Term Care insurance. We love you but we don't want to put a strain on your marriage and your finances when it gets to that point. Promise me", Mom would plead. "Sure, Mom, whatever you and Daddy want", I would respond.'

"Judy, Mom, Dad and I had this conversation frequently through the years, with always the same response on my part, not really understanding what it might mean. But now Mom has dementia, Daddy is worn out from caring for her and from just being 7 years older. I felt so overwhelmed that I would frequently cry on my friend's shoulder."

"Do you recall when Jane had something like this with her parents, and her Mom was calling her 10 times a day? She almost lost her job! Jane was always taking time off work, besides it wore her out!" Judy reminded me.

I can't do that for my parents. I can't leave my job during the day, and I promised their needs would not take over my life. Has anyone else ever had a loved one who had the same request? Are there transportation services to assist them? I have heard of "Meals on Wheels" but could they qualify for something like that? What if Daddy can't keep track of their finances any longer? Do they need help taking a shower; with minor housekeeping; or the laundry which is down the steps in the basement; also they both need some interaction with their peers; and my list keeps growing.

So I did some research and found the Caregiver Resource Network online at www.caregiverresource.net. The Caregiver Resource Network provided information on a wide range of services available to assist my parents and me. With so many services available, I began to see that my parents aren't the only ones who desire to remain as independent as possible. I started by contacting an elder law attorney and their financial advisor. Not much money there, but by being good stewards of what they have we should be able to make it work in meeting their needs.

I interviewed several Home Care companies and found a wonderful service to come right into their house to help. Mom has complained about changing the sheets for years, and they can traverse the basement steps, yet allow Mom to still fold her clothes and put them away. They also provide physical therapy to help keep Mom from falling, and if Daddy has to have another skin cancer removed they will keep the dressing fresh so he won't end up back in the hospital with another infection. I also ordered a personal emergency alert system so if Mom should fall again the system will call for help immediately, and I took over my parents finances.

Mom now attends an Adult Day Services program a couple days a week. A local senior transportation provider picks her up right at the front door and returns her home safely.

While she is gone Daddy enjoys a nap, reads his paper, meets his friends at the Senior Center, and is just Daddy. This makes me feel really good! This same transportation service also takes them to their doctor's appointments. If I need to be there I can meet them and shoot right back to work. I can't be superwoman like Jane. Oh, that's right, Jane ended up in the hospital herself.

"Judy, do you recall when I was so worried about how I would be able to keep my promise to Mom and Daddy about them not being a burden on us? Well, it is falling into place. We even visited some senior retirement communities. They have really changed from what we saw even 10 years ago! But I did notice several of them have a waiting list, so we are going to begin "shopping" next Saturday for their next home while they are still in as much control as possible. I am excited for them and relieved for me that I could keep my promise. With so many services available to take care of their health and needs, I can continue to be their daughter, and yet assist them without their feeling as though they are a burden to me. Instead we can do more fun things together, they can watch the grandkids grow up, and have their own friends as well! I am thrilled!"

Caregiver's Corner is provided as a public service of the **Caregiver Resource Network**. The Caregiver Resource Network is a collaboration of West Michigan organizations dedicated to providing for the needs and welfare of family and professional caregivers within the community. Funded by the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan with Older American's Act Title III-E, Family Caregiver Support funds. For more information consult our website at www.CaregiverResource.net or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664.