

# Presenting the Life Care Plan



**M**rs. Robinson, an eighty year old woman, has a stroke. She ends up in the hospital unable to speak or even write her name. The doctors can't tell if she understands even the most basic commands. When her Social Security check arrives, her adult son attempts to take it to the bank for deposit, but because he doesn't have a deposit slip and doesn't know the account number, he can't deposit it. He is then unable to pay the bills, and has to use his own limited funds to keep his mother house running.

This is a scenario that Mary Jo Pleva has seen time and time again in her work as a geriatric care manager. "Patients don't understand the importance of advanced planning", she states. "If people knew the difficulty lack of planning causes their loved ones, I think more people might plan ahead of time".

Mrs. Pleva regularly assists Steven A. Early, a Colleyville Attorney specializing in Elder Law. Together they provide Life Care Planning For their older clients. His firm is one of several law firms currently in the Tarrant County area that focuses its

practice on the Life Care planning model. The other being Katten & Benson, who has hired Kim Olmedo as its elder care coordinator. As anyone who has had to deal with the difficulties of meeting the needs of an older adult with chronic illness, the problems are varied and complex, and cut across several disciplines. There are numerous questions that has to be addressed, including how to get the best possible medical care, how does one determine the most appropriate living environment while also meeting the needs of the individual, and how do you match the resources of the individual to pay for the level of care that is needed? In addition, there are legal issues that involve making certain someone has the legal ability to act for the older adult if such person loses capacity, and making certain that the person's assets pass to the desired beneficiaries after such person's death.

Life Care Planning is a comprehensive and holistic way to help older adults plan for the future. The Life Care Planning team will do a comprehensive assessment of the client's legal, financial, health and psychosocial needs. Once this assessment is done, an Action Plan is developed that helps the older client anticipate needs, such as home modifications to allow the client to remain in their home as long as safely possible. The plan will also help the client look ahead to the time they might not be able to remain in their home, and offer alternative living situations that the client can afford.

Presenting the Life Care Plan to the client is only the beginning of the relationship. "Once we have developed a Life Care Plan with the client, we will continue a relationship with the client for the rest of their lives. They will always be able to call us if they need legal help or help from the elder care coordinator," said Ms. Olmedo.

This access to help, especially the coordination of care, is especially important for those older adults with chronic health problems who may need assistance negotiating an increasingly complex healthcare system. The goal is to allow the client to remain in the least restrictive environment for as long as possible, as the individual moves along the continuum of care from independent living to the need for nursing home care. Once the client gets to the point of needing long term nursing care, the Life Care Planning team can assist with Medicaid planning, if the client is not able to pay for the care themselves.

The Life Care Planning concept involves an upfront fee, which assures the services of the Life Care Planning team for the rest of the life of the client. In this manner, there is a commitment both from the firm and the client and his or her family to work together to provide the best possible care for the client for the rest of his life. The goal is to work together as a team, to provide comprehensive assistance in a new and unique manner designed to provide peace of mind for the client and the client's family.



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