

## ***Balancing Act: Care-Giving, Independence and Time***

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**I**T WAS THAT head-snapping moment. You know – the comment you just heard but can't believe you just heard it. We'll come back to that later in this article.

Envision for a moment the fine line between giving your aging parent(s) enough space to maintain their independence and privacy and the need to verify everything said to them from their doctors and healthcare workers. Whether they can't hear, can't comprehend or can't understand the medical jargon, is irrelevant. All lead to the same outcome – a misunderstanding of what the doctor said and confusion on how to treat their chronic condition(s).



Most of our aging parents see several physicians for various conditions. And almost all of them prescribe multiple medications. By the time they're all counted, it's not uncommon for a senior citizen to be taking 6 or more medications a day, many that look alike, all with different instructions. And you've probably noticed that doctors are taking less time with their patients than ever before. To say that the practice of medicine has changed is a huge

understatement. Government and insurance company reimbursement rates continue to decrease and regulation and overhead continues to increase. Not a winning formula for physicians spending time with their patients. Our aging parents are at the most vulnerable time in their life, both physically and mentally. Ironically, they have more health issues, need more understanding and instruction on medication and treatment, need more time with their healthcare professionals – and typically get less.

And so, between doctor visits they just live their lives as best they can. Try asking an elderly parent what the doctor said about their condition and what they need to do to treat it a day after the appointment. You know the drill. "He said I was fine and to just keep taking my medication." And that's one of four doctors that somehow, according to your parent, all say the same thing.

Your mom or dad won't volunteer a lot of information to you. They don't "want you to worry." That new pain they had is "just normal when you get old." They're "feeling pretty good" so they decide to take their daily medication every other day "just to save some money." They've "fallen a couple of times lately but only had scrapes and bruises." Their "arthritis" is acting up so they've "doubled up on their pain medication." That "dizzy spell" they have a few times a month is "probably just because I get tired." That tingling and numbness in their arm "doesn't last very long."

And now back to the head-snapping moment.....

After learning about all these various things, you take her to the doctor. You want to hear what's going on firsthand. As the doctor comes in the examination room, he smiles and asks your mom,

“Well Sara, how are you doing?” Now wait for it..... You know what’s coming..... “Well, I’m doing just fine!”

Great! That’s just what the doctor wanted to hear! He has 15 more patients to see before the end of the day and remember, he’s pressed for time! In the meantime, you snap your head around to mom and can’t believe what you just heard. And without you there to speak up, she and her doctor part ways in about 8 minutes – with the “unsaid” left for the emergency room at a later date.

Now let’s talk about you. You’re not in a position to have more oversight on her care. You have a full-time job. You still have kids in school, financial pressures and maybe even some health conditions of your own. Or, you may not even live in the same city or state as your parent. And so you have the dilemma so many baby boomers currently or very soon will be facing – “how do I provide the proper care for my parent?”

It’s been said, “There are four kinds of people in this world: Those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers, those who will be caregivers and those who will need caregivers.”

So what’s a solution? You might want to try what thousands have already tried and found a tremendous help – chronic condition intervention and medication management. It’s a time-tested, case study proven approach to providing a continuum of care between doctor visits combined with clinical pharmacy oversight through a care team of healthcare professionals. Think of it as your own personal healthcare advocates who see the entire field of care – knows who your doctors are and what they are treating you for – knows your medications and when you should take them – communicates with you on a regular basis – develops a personal, authentic relationship with you based on honesty and trust – personal but not in-person. Having a healthcare professional as an advocate that contacts you by phone at least once a month (more if needed) allows a completely open, authentic conversation. Remember that head-snapping moment in the doctor’s office? In person, she has a standard answer – “I’m doing just fine” whether she is or not. With a telephone assessment and relationship built with the same healthcare professional over time, honesty prevails and problems can be uncovered and properly treated long before they become an emergency event. There’s something about a non-face-to-face consultation with a non-judgmental caring professional that fosters honest communication and trust. This service has proven to make people with chronic conditions get better, feel better and stay better.

It’s a godsend for baby boomers with aging parents. Just think if you could put all your parent’s doctors in one room and ask a simple question. “Which one of you is the quarterback?” “Who oversees and knows what all of you are treating dad for?” You would most likely get a lot of blank stares. With multiple doctors prescribing multiple medications for various chronic conditions, someone needs to see the entire playing field of care. That’s what this service does. And they do it extremely well.