

## **Aging Happens: Taking advantage of expert advice can save time, money**

*By Ellen Waldman*

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In the last month, I had a call from a son who was concerned about his mother. She was placed in a foster care home, under the advice of someone who called herself a “senior advisor.” This person was not a member of the Aging Life Care Association ([aginglifecare.org](http://aginglifecare.org)). Turns out, this was not the right spot for his mother, and the son was now needing help. All he wanted me to do was provide him with the names of some better foster care homes so he could move her there.

This is not how an appropriate placement gets made. In this case, I really needed to know a lot more about her cognitive status, personality, financial ability, and other factors. The son was still reluctant to have a consultation with me, and wanted to think it over. Turns out, he did get back to me after a few weeks of trying to sort this out on his own. When we finally met together, he was amazed at the amount of information he was not aware of regarding housing options and other care issues. At the end of our meeting, he actually said that he wanted to pay me twice my usual fee for this service — that’s how beneficial he felt this was for him.

Now, I’m not telling this story so I can pat myself on the back, but as an example of what happens when people experience what a professional in this field can offer. The fee for service was truly offset by the value this family received. Instead of talking more about my experiences, I decided to speak with another professional care manager, Lucy Jackson, MS, RN, nurse practitioner (541-778-7460; [lucy.jackson48@gmail.com](mailto:lucy.jackson48@gmail.com)), and ask her some questions. Lucy has a master’s degree in Family Health Care Nursing, with nurse practitioner experience in medical and behavioral health, and is a member of the Aging Life Care Association.

EW: What have you seen as some of the biggest needs that aging adults and their families have?

LJ: The greatest needs I see, especially as a former nurse practitioner, are navigating the health care system, and problem solving to help stay in their home. If they are going to be transitioning out of the home, they often need help to find a residence that meets their individual needs and desires. People also need a personal advocate who supports them through the gradual changes that occur in their health: physical, emotional, cognitive, mobility, vision and hearing.

EW: What are the challenges with navigating the health care systems?

LJ: With my background and experience in the medical field, I have seen many challenges. As their care manager and advocate, I can help with all of them. Here are a few:

1. Being able to communicate your needs to your doctor by phone or online messages, which often eliminates unnecessary doctor visits, emergency room visits or even hospitalizations
2. Telling the doctor how you are responding to medications; eliminating the need for unnecessary medications or too high of dosages; assessing side effects of medications
3. Hearing, understanding, and remembering what is said by the doctor at an office visit, and what this means for the client and their health. Conveying this info to the family, if requested.

4. Understanding the language that health care providers use; needing someone to translate the medical language into practical solutions.

EW: What feedback do you hear from families after they've utilized your services?

LJ: I'll use some actual quotes as examples: "Because of you, I can sleep at night" (daughter who lives out of state); "I couldn't have gone through this without you" (adult child of client); "I'm grateful for the careful care you gave our mother" (children of a woman confined to a wheelchair in assisted living); "I couldn't do this without you" (client with dementia); "My husband's behavior was out of control; I couldn't have placed him in the right situation without your help – I was too frightened."; "Thank you for the impeccable care that was provided to my sister"; "You were able to assess the issues before they became unmanageable" (family of client).

EW: What suggestions would you offer to those facing their own older years?

LJ: Now is the time to seek help for yourself, your family or friends before health changes make it harder to manage safely. Verify that this person is a specialist in both medical and psychological geriatric care.

As the adult child I referenced at the beginning of this column, you might be surprised by how much time, energy, confusion, and even money you actually save with professional assistance like that of Lucy Jackson. Maybe it's not too soon.