



What's in a name? Association sets standards

By Ellen Waldman

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I'll start with a joke. Question: What do you call a person who graduates at the bottom of their class in medical school? Answer: Doctor. The point of this is that just because someone has a degree, it does not necessarily qualify them as top-flight in their field. But since we need filters, guidelines and criteria to make an informed choice, we often use titles to do just that. I'm going to talk about my own professional field, not to promote myself, but to inform you on some recent changes and how it might affect your choices when selecting a professional.

There are so many people now who provide services to seniors and their families. Many of them are quite well-trained and qualified for their work. But with the rise in need, there is a concomitant rise in risk of potential abuse. Just because someone gives themselves a title, this does not indicate if they are truly qualified for that role. I have known people who have taken care of a parent and thereafter decided that they too, were a care manager. This is not true, of course, but until now, it's been difficult to determine the best way to check out their qualifications.

This month, the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers is formally changing its name. It has spent over a year looking into this situation. Too many similar titles (elder care manager, senior care advisor, case manager, etc.), have resulted in confusion for consumers of these services. Now, only those who meet or exceed the standards in this field, can become a member of the Aging Life Care Association. The trademarking of this name allows those who meet its stringent requirements to use the title of Aging Life Care Professional. I think this is a step in the right direction for all. From their new documents: "The names 'Aging Life Care' and 'Aging Life Care Professional' will become recognized as distinguishing the services of Aging Life Care Association (ALCA) members from those of others serving the aging community. These names will encourage reliance and trust. They will be indicators of professionalism, integrity and competence."

If you're not sure what these services actually are, please check out their website: aginglifecare.org. You will also see what it takes to qualify for membership at various levels. If you want to find a professional here locally, do this: Go to the website, click on "find an aging life care expert." Next, put in the Ashland zip code and a 50 mile radius. You will see eight highly qualified individuals who are available to help you out.

To be clear, I am not selling these services. As in other columns, I am only informing and reporting on what is out there, so you can make your own educated decisions and choices. This website won't guarantee that you'll "click" with any of these people listed on the site. There are lots of flavors of help and this is just one way to sample them. We are so fortunate that we have many other excellent professionals who support our aging population. They fill many unique and important roles here.

In this small town, we have dementia experts for both the person with the diagnosis and those caring for them; fiduciaries who specialize in the older sector; private care providers with superb resumes; licensed caregiving agencies that care for those with the most needs; and so on. The work they do is

commendable. Any and all of these providers can use some version of “senior care manager” in their titles. But only those who took the steps to join the ALCA can use the title of “Aging Life Care” member. If this matters to you, now you’ll know the difference.

I recommend that you always ask any providers of services for their qualifications and get local references. If you took advantage of the workshop on scam protection offered by the Ashland Police Department, you know there are plenty of ways to prevent abuses. This is just another level to consider when making decisions about choosing and working with a professional.