

Michigan Generations™

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HOSPITAL to HOME

How to ensure a
smooth transition

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A Closer Look at Caregiving

What does the term “caregiver” mean?

THE TERM “CAREGIVER” HAS A WIDE range of meanings. It is typically associated with someone who assists an elderly person who needs mental, emotional or physical support. A caregiver can be someone who regularly visits an elderly person, someone who has taken on responsibility for overseeing the welfare of an elderly person, or someone who is the power of attorney or guardian for an elderly person.

Who is a typical caregiver?

CAREGIVERS ARE USUALLY FAMILY members. But other people such as close friends, privately hired nurses, designated patient advocates or court-appointed guardians also can have caregiver roles.

What can a caregiver do if someone they are caring for is not getting good care in their nursing home or hospital?

CONCERN OVER QUALITY OF CARE IS something that caregivers often face, but usually do not know how to effectively address. Caregivers may feel timid about raising concerns with nursing home or hospital staff and management. They may feel like they do not have the expertise to second-guess facility staff

when obvious problems arise, or that the facility may retaliate against them. If the caregivers do raise concerns, nursing home or hospital staff may react negatively, which often further increases the caregiver’s stress level.

There are, however, practical steps that every caregiver can take when a problem with quality of care arises. Typical problems can include simple concerns like dirty or un-kept rooms, or serious issues such as the development of bedsores, dehydration, improper nutrition, a lack of safety rails, or failure of care coordination among physicians and facility staff.

One of the most effective measures is to make frequent visits on irregular schedules. If a caregiver visits at the same time of the day or week, the facility staff may start to predict the caregiver’s schedule and put things in order in anticipation of the visit. Arriving at irregular times can help a caregiver gain a true understanding of the typical quality of care that the facility provides.

Another important measure is to take photographs of the facility living conditions. Photographs can help document assessments and add credibility to formal complaints that a caregiver may raise.

If a caregiver cannot get resolution of their concerns from a facility’s staff, another option is to contact the local Area Agency on Aging and ask for an ombudsman to help resolve the issues. Ombudsmen provide an unbiased analysis of a caregiver’s concerns and can help to facilitate open communication between a facility and a caregiver.

What are some examples of real problems that caregivers might face?

OFTEN CAREGIVERS LACK THE EXPERTISE to solve problems easily on their own, or they may feel uneasy about raising

complaints about quality of care. For example, a caregiver recently attempted to work directly with a nursing home to increase the quality of care her mother was receiving. The nursing home was aware that her mother was diabetic and was not to be given food with high sugar content, but the staff continually fed her mother honey at meals. It was necessary to emphasize to the staff that the mother’s care plan specified her dietary requirements. Posting these instructions directly above her bed helped the staff become aware of her diabetic condition.

Another example occurred when a caregiver was searching for a nursing home for her mother-in-law that was close to her family in Oakland County. The mother-in-law was in the process of applying for Medicaid after a hospital stay, and the hospital social worker told the family that the only available nursing home was in Wayne County. After additional research on nearby facilities, the family was able to coordinate with Medicaid to place the woman in an Oakland County nursing home where her family could visit her daily. Medicaid initially said that they had lost the woman’s original application, but they finally agreed to expedite a new application since the mother-in-law was close to death and needed to remain close to her family.

A word of advice: Every caregiver needs to speak up if they sense something is wrong and not accept sub-standard care under any circumstance.

JAMIE M. VERDI is a health care and elder law attorney who regularly represents caregivers. You can reach her at 248-410-4945 and www.mipalhealth.com.

Do you have a caregiving question?

Write or email your question to our “Expert” at Jenny Jarvis, Area Agency on Aging I-B, 29100 Northwestern Highway, Suite 400, Southfield, MI 48034; jjarvis@aaa1b.com. We will make every effort to answer your question in an upcoming issue of *Michigan Generations*.

RESOURCE GUIDE

for Michigan Caregivers and Seniors

Clip and Save this list of important statewide and regional resources and services.

STATEWIDE RESOURCES

Bureau of Health Services (nursing home complaints)... 1-800-882-6006
Department of Consumer Industries
(adult foster care complaints) 1-866-685-0006
Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program (MMAP) 1-800-803-7174
Michigan Office of the Attorney General www.seniorbrigade.com
Michigan Office of Services to the Aging www.miseniors.net

REGIONAL RESOURCES

DETROIT AREA AGENCY ON AGING (1A):

Information and Assistance 313-446-4444

Outreach & Assistance

Bridging Communities — Detroit 313-361-6377
Detroit Senior Citizens Department — Detroit 313-224-1000
Neighborhood Legal Services Michigan — Redford 313-937-8291
Services for Older Citizens — Grosse Pointe 313-882-9600

Senior Centers

Association of Chinese Americans, Inc. 313-831-1790
Delray United Action 313-297-7921
Latino Family Services 313-841-7380
North American Indian Assn. of Detroit 313-535-2966
St. Patrick Senior Center 313-833-7080
St. Rose Senior Citizen Center 313-921-9277
Virginia Park Citizens Service Corp. 313-894-2830
Reuther Older Adult & Wellness Services 313-831-8650

AREA AGENCY ON AGING 1-B:

Information and Assistance 1-800-852-7795

Catholic Social Services of Washtenaw County 734-971-9781

Deaf and Hearing Impaired Services
..... 248-473-1888; TTY: 248-473-1875

Greater Detroit Agency for the Blind & Visually Impaired . 313-272-3900

Livingston County Catholic Social Services 517-545-5944

Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency (OLHSA)

Oakland 248-209-2600
Livingston 517-546-8500

The Council on Aging, Inc., serving St. Clair County 810-987-8811

The Macomb County Dept. of Senior Citizen Services 586-469-6313

The Monroe County Commission on Aging 734-240-7363

REGION 2 AREA AGENCY ON AGING:

Information and Assistance 1-800-335-7881

MI Choice Medicaid Waiver Program 1-800-335-7881

Hillsdale County Senior Services Center .. 517-437-2422 or 1-800-479-3348

Jackson Department on Aging 517-788-4364 or 1-800-788-3579

Lenawee Department on Aging 517-264-5280

Legal Services of South Central Michigan 517-787-6111

REGION IV AREA AGENCY ON AGING:

AAA Info-Line 1-800-654-2810; www.AreaAgencyOnAging.org

Custom Care — Care Connections of Southwest Michigan
..... 1-800-442-2803; www.AreaAgencyOnAging.org

Elder Care Locator 1-800-677-1666; www.eldercare.gov

Senior Nutrition Services .. 1-800-722-5392; www.seniornutritionregiv.org

Senior Volunteer and Intergeneration Programs
..... 1-877-660-2725; www.AreaAgencyOnAging.org

TRI-COUNTY OFFICE ON AGING (REGION 6):

Information and Assistance — Clinton, Eaton and Ingham Counties
..... 1-800-405-9141 or 517-887-1440; www.tcoa.org

Project Choices 1-800-405-9141 or 517-887-1440
*For in-home service assistance and the Medicaid home/
community-based services waiver (MI Choice)*

Meals-On-Wheels

Greater Lansing 517-887-1460 or 1-800-405-9141
Clinton County 989-224-3600 or 1-888-224-3030
Eaton County 517-541-2330 or 1-866-541-5444
Rural Ingham County 517-676-2775
Senior Dining Site Information 517-887-1393 or 1-800-405-9141
AARP Tax Assistance 517-887-1440 or 1-800-405-9141

REGION VII AREA AGENCY ON AGING:

Information and Assistance 1-800-858-1637

Alzheimer's Association of Mid-Michigan 1-800-337-3827

Citizens for Better Care (Nursing Home Advocacy Ombudsman)
..... 1-800-284-0046

Lakeshore Legal Aid 1-866-552-2889

MI Choice Medicaid Waiver Program 1-800-858-1637

Bay Co. Division on Aging 989-895-4100

Clare County Council on Aging 1-800-952-3160

Gladwin County Council on Aging 1-800-952-0056

Gratiot County Commission on Aging 989-875-5246

Human Development Commission (Huron, Tuscola
and Sanilac counties) 989-673-4121 or 1-800-843-6394

Isabella County Commission on Aging 1-800-878-0726

Midland County Council on Aging 1-800-638-2058

Saginaw County Commission on Aging 1-866-763-6336

NEMCSA REGION 9 AREA AGENCY ON AGING:

Information and Assistance 989-356-3474

Long-Term Care Ombudsman 1-866-485-9393

Multi-purpose Senior Centers

Alcona County Commission on Aging 989-736-8879

Alpena Area Senior Citizens Council 989-356-3585

Arenac County Council on Aging 989-653-2692

Cheboygan County Council on Aging 231-627-7234

Crawford County Commission on Aging 989-348-7123

Iosco County Commission on Aging 989-728-6484

Montmorency County Commission on Aging 989-785-2580

Ogemaw County Commission on Aging 989-345-5300

Oscoda County Council on Aging 989-826-3025

Otsego County Commission on Aging 989-732-1122

Presque Isle County Council on Aging 989-766-8191

Roscommon County Commission on Aging 989-366-0205

UPPER PENINSULA AREA AGENCY ON AGING/UPCAP:

Information & Assistance Dial 2-1-1 or 906-786-4701

Outside the U.P. 1-800-338-7227

U.P. Long Term Care Ombudsman 1-866-485-9393

UPCAP Care Management/Field Offices

Escanaba 906-786-4701

Houghton 906-482-0982

Iron Mountain 906-774-9918

Marquette 906-228-6169

Sault Ste. Marie 906-632-9835