

SPOT LIGHT ON CAREGIVERS

ELDERCARE PLANNING; FAMILY MEETING

Spotlight on Caregivers

Eldercare Planning: Family Meetings

It is standard practice for businesses to tackle tough issues through meetings with concerned parties. Similarly, meetings with family members and caregivers for the purpose of coordinating the care of an elderly family member and addressing problems as they arise is a crucial element in elder care planning.

Overcoming Barriers to Holding a Family Meeting

There can be various barriers to meetings, both real and imagined. Geography is a big one—often families are widely dispersed across the country. Lives are already busy and often overscheduled without adding yet another commitment. Paid caregivers might not want to donate their time, and families may feel it is too expensive to pay them for meeting time.

Why Hold a Meeting?

Whether or not there are specific problems to solve, sharing information and airing thoughts will be productive. Caring for a frail older person is never easy. Holding a meeting is almost always going to improve the situation if it is well-planned, well-attended, and conducted appropriately.

Who to Invite

It is best to keep the meeting numbers between about 3 and 10. It is important to include the loved one concerned, even if it means holding the meeting in a hospital room. Some families may consider it inappropriate to include the loved one, perhaps because the disabilities of that person make it difficult to discuss the situation in front of him or her, or for cultural reasons. Each family is different, so you must decide what works within your family dynamic, but including the elder can often make a profound difference in success of both the process and the decision-making that can come out of such a meeting.

Professional caregivers are sometimes overlooked and can often provide important information. It's possible that a caregiver may know the most about relevant issues, such as incontinence or other health problems the elder may be reluctant to speak of with the family. You may also wish to invite neighbors and close friends. For family out of the area who may not be able to travel, conference calling and video calling options such as Skype are now commonly used. Depending on your family's spiritual beliefs, it can be helpful to include a religious advisor. Every family is unique. The most important consideration is to be as inclusive as possible and not overlook resources to help your family.

Prior to the Meeting

Develop and review the elder care planning agenda in advance with all concerned. Use whatever communication method is most convenient for the majority of your group.

Be sure to assign a neutral person to the role of facilitator. Another person might be designated to be the note taker. Arrange a comfortable physical environment with food and beverages and comfortable seating where everyone can make eye contact.

What to Cover

If there is a specific issue to address that requires “buy-in” of all concerned, make sure it is approached as diplomatically as possible. The family members may have divergent ideas of what is important. For example, if the main topic of your meeting is that your mom may need to move out of her home and she resists this, you might start the process discussing “pros and cons of mom moving.” This might lead to a discussion of “why we want you to move.” Be frank: “We are afraid you’ll fall and not be able to get up.” This might lead to a discussion of all the possible solutions, including personal alert systems, cell phones, a daily phone call or visitor, as well as the benefits and potential drawbacks of an actual move.

Next Steps

Distribute the notes to all concerned, even people who could not attend but wanted to be there. Honor and follow up on what was decided at the meeting. Be flexible in case the situation changes. Your loved one may be fine at home now with the new support systems set in place as a result of the meeting, but even without saying so, families usually recognize that the situation will most likely change.

Whatever the outcome of the family meeting, try to remember that it may not solve every problem. Sometimes just being able to mitigate some dilemmas and clear the air is a step in the right direction.

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<http://www.aplaceformom.com/senior-care-resources/articles/elder-care-planning>



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