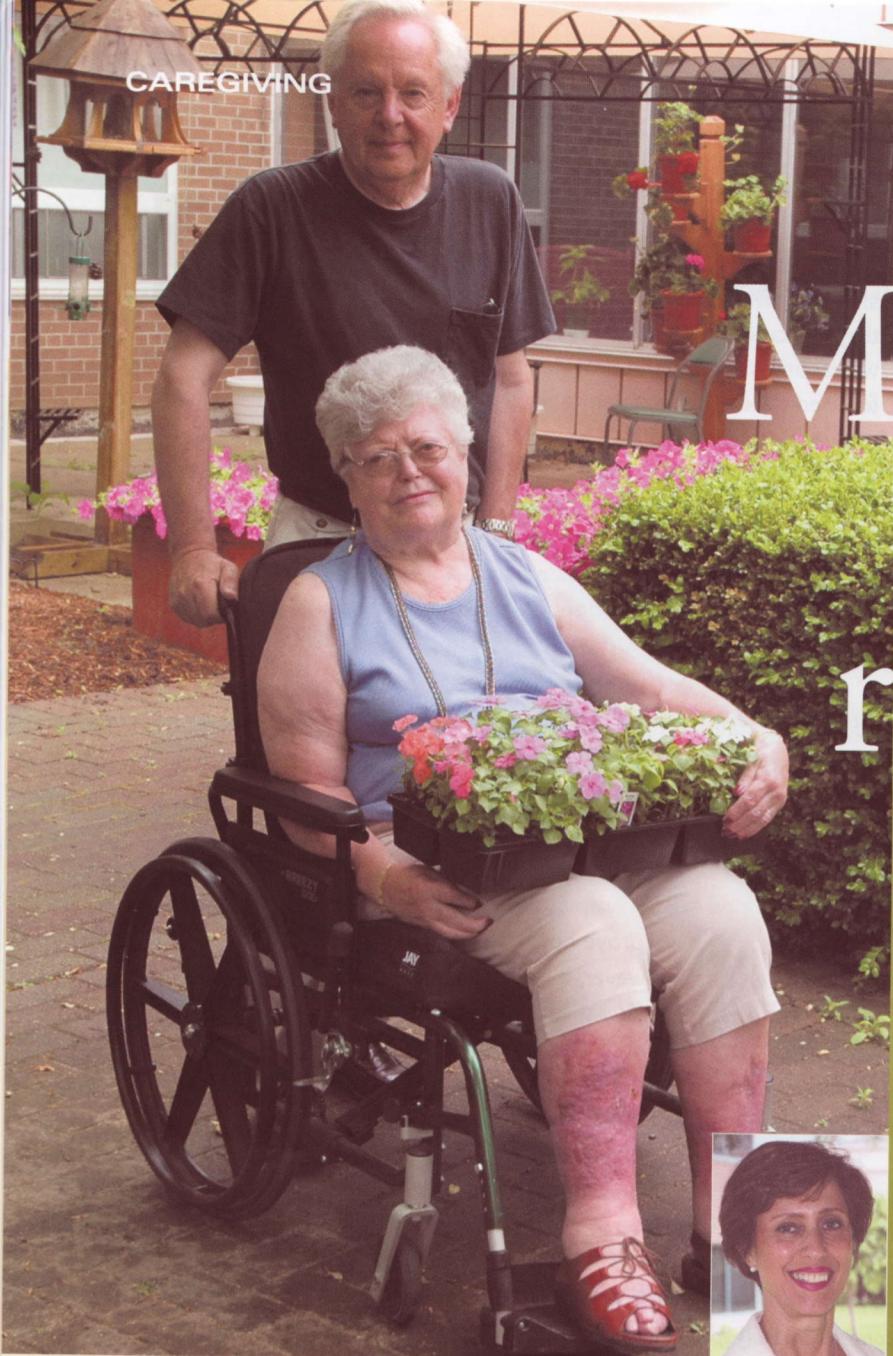


CAREGIVING



Managing risk, reducing stress:

*How to stabilize
a care situation*

By Carol Edwards, RN, GCM

5 good ideas for caregivers

1. Monitor the situation.
2. Seek the help of family and friends.
3. Evaluate options carefully.
4. Make decisions to stabilize care.
5. Ask a neutral third party to assist.

Risk may sound exciting in our early years, but it takes on a new connotation in later years as we become caregivers for our parents. It's not sexy anymore. It's scary!

Every caregiving situation poses some level of risk. For example, mom's health is deteriorating. Do you move her to a long-term-care facility? Or do you move her into your home, which is what she really wants? How much risk should you take on to provide the best care? What are your rights versus your parent's rights?

The baby boomer generation is not used to giving up and has high expectations. It will not be easy for them to lower those expectations, and some may resent or not have time to do tasks for their elderly parents.



Son-in-law
Helmut

So, what are some situations where the adult son's or daughter's risk is very real? What can be done? Let's look at three situations.

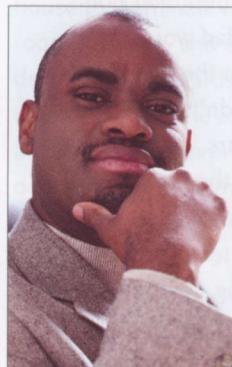
Scenario one: Totally distressed

An elderly father and mother live in their own condominium. They have led a privileged life but are getting decidedly forgetful. The mother is not coping, and the father is still wrapped up in work but is not functioning well at the office. Both the son, who has power of attorney (POA), and the daughter-in-law are totally distressed. To make things worse, mother is difficult and slow to accept care from support workers. No one can agree on a course of action. What does the son who has POA do?



Son
William

Scenario two: Choosing the wrong facility



Nephew
Layton

Because of dwindling resources, a nephew, who has POA, is forced to transfer his uncle from around-the-clock care at home to a long-term-care facility. The nephew has no idea what criteria to follow in selecting a facility. After a bit of research,

the nephew learns of the many aspects to consider in a

long-term-care facility: staff attitudes, management style, ethnic mix of residents, recreational programs, type of occupancy, room size, security, medical staff, and food service, among other criteria. He also learns that personalizing care for his uncle is imperative to the success of the transfer. What should his next step be?

Scenario three: Losing a job

A daughter, who is an only child, spends many hours caring for her aging parents. She's feeling some pressure from her employer about her

telephone calls and the time she's taking off work. Unfortunately, her parents' situation is unstable and unpredictable.

She's been considering taking on less hours and responsibility; unfortunately, she can't afford to cut back her income. How tolerant can management be towards her needs? What step is right for her?

In the above three scenarios, each caregiver is in an unstable situation that needs to be resolved quickly to avoid further problems. They are all at risk. While there are many possible solutions, each caregiver, given their personal time constraints, would benefit by hiring a geriatric care manager (GCM).

For the son in scenario one, a GCM would provide a neutral party and monitor the aging parents' situation and report to him and the rest of the family. In the nephew's scenario, a care manager would be familiar with the local long-term-care facilities and will do the legwork for him to ensure "the best choice." In the daughter's situation, a care manager could monitor her parents' needs and arrange support staff to organize daily care, including shopping, cooking, laundry, taking the parents to medical appointments, and so on.

For any caregiver, stabilizing a care situation will reduce risk. Oftentimes, minimizing risk involves assessing the care situation, evaluating options, and making careful decisions.

So, how can you, as a caregiver, minimize risk? By monitoring the situation and seeking the help of others when necessary. Outside sources of support can include family members, friends or a care manager or family physician. No matter whom you choose, seek the advice of someone familiar with your situation.

Once you've sought other people's opinions, it's time to make a decision. Consider the implications of each choice. Your best choice will come by understanding the needs and wishes of the elder person and by including that person in your decision-making. ●

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Daughter
Sandra

**"Some days
you're the pigeon
and some days
you're the
statue."**

Anonymous