

Let's face it: many elderly people usually have several complex medical conditions. So how can a busy family physician take care of all of a senior's many issues during a typical 15-minute office visit? And, what are the chances of doctor's advice being understood, retained and implemented by a senior after he or she leaves the office?

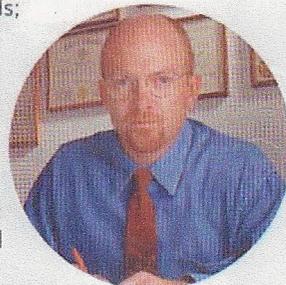
Who's on your team?

By Carol Edwards, RN, GCM

To ensure your parent is properly looked after, you'll often need more than yourself and a family physician. You'll need a team of professionals. In my experience, this team should include, in addition to the family doctor, a

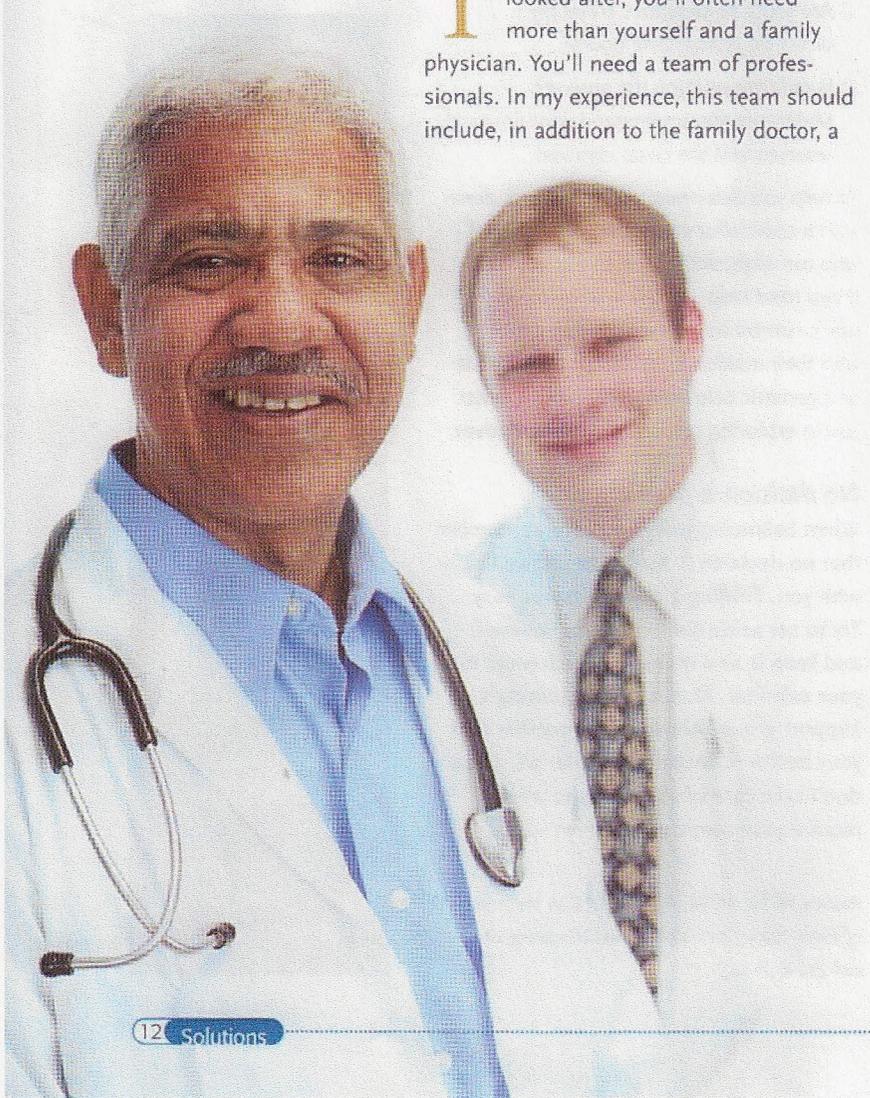
pharmacist, geriatric care manager, a geriatrician, a home care team, and a home health care equipment provider. Here's how they can work collaboratively to treat your parent:

Family physician: This professional is the designated port of entry in our health care system. He or she is responsible for all health care records; consequently, the care of a patient is orchestrated through this office, and all records and referrals are registered with him or her.



The family physician is also a referral agent who investigates symptoms and then refers the client to a specialist such as a cardiologist, neurologist or orthopaedic physician. The family doctor is also the point of access to other important community services such as dietitians, speech-language pathologists, and occupational or physical therapists.

A geriatrician (left) and a pharmacist (right) are important professionals you should have on your care team.



Pharmacist: These professionals do more than fill prescriptions! In fact, the pharmacist is a vital part of the older person's "monitoring system." You can rely on the pharmacist to monitor drug interactions, side effects, and potential allergies related to your parent's medications. And you can ask them to prepare these medications into a dosette or blister pack to prevent medication-related errors and to serve as a daily reminder for the older person.



Geriatric care manager: Since this professional is often a nurse, she or he can monitor your parent's health and identify and report symptoms to you before they reach crisis proportions. They can also take your parent to medical appointments, co-ordinate visits to specialists, and help implement suggested treatments. A geriatric care manager can also help you with caregiving-related problems.



Home care team: Nursing, personal support, homemaking, cleaning and companionship services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.



Occupational, physio and speech-language therapy can also be provided in the home. Some services are covered by your provincial health plan and others will need to be paid privately. Hint: be sure to use a reputable home health care provider and check references.

Home health care equipment provider:

From wheelchairs to walkers and other assistive devices, there are a plethora of innovative technologies and equipment available for use in the home. But choosing the right device can be confusing without help. Ask your health professional to recommend equipment based on an assessment of your loved one's needs. He or she will give you an equipment prescription and will refer you to a reliable, local retailer.



Geriatrician: The specialist in eldercare is the much-sought-after geriatrician. While they are in short supply, they have the skill and expertise to monitor your parent's medication, lifestyle and nutritional issues. These specialists are best qualified to monitor your parent's memory and recommend antipsychotic medications (as is often required by the cognitively impaired).

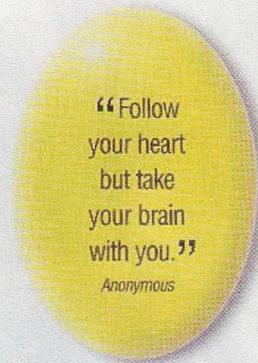


Many geriatricians are experts in psychiatry, medicine and conditions of the elderly. These skilled physicians can change a family doctor's suggested treatment, thus impeding the progression of disease in the elderly.

However, there are restrictions in the number of annual visits to a geriatrician that will be funded, usually two or three. While hardly sufficient, these visits are still helpful when your parent requires complex care.

Older adults have a variety of health care needs. As such, they often need more support than a busy family caregiver can manage or provide. By assembling a caring team of the right health care professionals, you can ensure your parent receives the best care and enjoys the best health in their golden years. ●

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"Follow your heart but take your brain with you."

Anonymous