

## **Planning Ahead for Care giving Starts with a List**

Many of us are currently assisting with the care of an aging parent. For some it is a gradual decline in health that initiates the care giving and for others it is an acute crisis that requires an immediate response.

People plan vacations and weddings but don't often think about planning for medical emergencies. Medical pre-planning is important for our senior population and for those of us who may be thrust into the role of caregiver. The care giving of an older relative may evolve as a gradual process or it may begin at the onset of an acute emergency such as a heart attack, stroke, or an accident.

I had not done any medical pre-planning when I received a phone call from my mother in March of 2013. She was living in Florida and I was in Louisiana. Ten seconds into a bizarre conversation I asked my mother if she could call 911. She responded, "I don't know what that is." My independent and highly intelligent mother had experienced a stroke.

I called 911 and learned that calling 911 in Louisiana cannot send an ambulance to an address in Florida. Two additional phone calls were needed to get an ambulance to her home. With that done, I wanted to contact a neighbor to go and stay with my mother until the ambulance arrived. Did I have phone numbers?? YES! I remembered that I had a list of phone numbers that Mom asked me to program into her cell phone many years earlier!

The next call I made was to the hospital. The nurse asked if my mother was taking any medications. She was, however, I did not know the names or dosages of her medications. Her doctors' names? I could not recall that either. I felt terrible.

That March I unexpectedly became a caregiver and medical advocate for my mother. Fortunately, she had begun "organizing her aging documents" after my father's death 2 years earlier. She had the big pieces in place. She had her Will, Power of Attorney, and Living Will all set and I had copies. These documents were very helpful and assisted greatly in my new role as caregiver. Mom was facing rehabilitation challenges while I was

working to learn about her stroke, educate myself in regard to her medical insurance, and make sure she received the best possible care.

The stroke caused impairments to her speech, reading, writing, memory and understanding. She was in the hospital for several days and then transferred to an acute rehabilitation hospital. Due to Medicare "guidelines" she was sent home after two weeks and would continue therapy in her home. My sister and I took turns living with my mother for the next 6 months. Initially we took over all the necessary decisions and day to day functions. We supported her and cheered as she began to recover and work toward regaining her independence.

Hoping to help others be prepared in the case of a medical emergency, I created a list of important items, as well as several of the less important items, that we needed to address while my mother was recovering.

While compiling the list below, I spoke with others who have aging parents or who are currently in a care giving roll. In some cases the parents initiated the discussion and shared their list of information with their adult children. These parents provided a folder containing important medical, financial, and legal information.

Having medical information **before** a health issue arises will save time and can assist doctors with the immediate critical care of a relative. The additional information in the list would be helpful for anyone who may become a future caregiver. There are many decisions made during the care giving process and having information before it is needed will make it easier.

Items needed for immediate acute care:

1. Power of Attorney and Medical Power of Attorney
2. Will and Living Will
3. Emergency numbers for the Police, Fire Department, or Security located in the community where your parent lives.

4. A list of the names and phone numbers of your parent's friends and neighbors.
5. Medical Insurance coverage used, the location of the cards, and the phone numbers on the cards.
6. The names and dosage of the medications they are taking, known allergies they may have and current/past medical conditions that may be important to their immediate care.
7. The name and phone number of their doctors. Ask that they consider adding your name to medical forms and charts so you can talk to the doctors.

Additional items that are helpful:

1. The name of their bank, tax preparer, and investment company. Consider being added as a signer to their checking account. This is a personal decision, but keep in mind it is much easier to do this before the need actually arises.
2. Computer information including email addresses, log in information and passwords.
3. Location of a house key, car key, safe key and safety deposit key.
4. The names and numbers of the people who maintain the lawn, fix the car, service the furnace and air conditioner, deliver oil etc.
5. Bill payment method used (mail or automatic withdraw from a bank account). If bills are paid automatically from a checking account consider having overdraft protection to a credit card established.
6. Provide your parent's friends and neighbors with your contact information. These folks can be your eyes and ears.
7. Know your parents preferred pharmacy and preferred hospital.
8. Consider some type of emergency alerting system for a parent living alone.

9. If funeral arrangements were made in advance have the necessary contact information.

10. Lastly ask that your parent keep an emergency envelope on the refrigerator that contains the name and number of their doctor, their medications and dosage, allergies, and contact information for reaching family. A copy of the Living will as well as the Medical Power of Attorney can be included in this envelope.

Submitted by Michele Elliot's daughter on 3/14/16