

## *Talking about Home Health Care*

By Kate McCarthy

The holidays are over and you have enjoyed spending quality time with your loved ones. During your visit you noticed that your mother was often confused and needed a lot more help than she did the last you were together. Doubt and worry about her ability to live alone are your constant companions now as it is obvious that her safety has become an issue.

While debating the possible options you realize that home health care would solve the problem. She could remain at home and have a professional Caregiver come daily to check on her, remind her to take her medications, and help out with the household chores. The

Caregiver could drive her to appointments, supervise showers and generally be there when you can't. You want to talk to her about bringing a home health Caregiver into the home, but dread starting a disagreement.



*Having the conversation can be upsetting to both generations*

### **How to talk to your loved ones about getting help:**

#### **What to understand:**

Most elderly take great pride in their independence. The idea of having a Caregiver come to the home is embarrassing to them. It is a sign that they cannot manage alone any longer. Although they logically understand they will need help someday, most

don't believe that day is now. Often approaching the use of home health as getting just "a little extra help" around the house is a more acceptable approach. Mentioning that a Caregiver will do the cleaning and help with the laundry makes the use of outside help a little less threatening. Once your aging loved one is used to having someone come into the home and that Caregiver has become a familiar companion, accepting help from them in other areas is not such an issue. Typically home health Caregivers provide a wide range of services including housekeeping, laundry, meal preparation, medication reminders, help with personal cares and transportation. A good Caregiver never infringes on their Client's independence but works in the background to help when needed.

#### How to start:

Start a general conversation and be very tactful. Raise questions about the care of the house. Just remarking that it must be difficult keeping up such a large place could guide the conversation along the right track. Most elderly are well aware that the care of the home may be slipping. Avoid statements that can cause your loved one to become defensive. Instead, ask if there is anything you can do to help. If there is a lot of resistance to just talking about it, you might want to wait a bit to mention the idea of home care. Gently mention your concerns and ask what possible solutions might be considered. Ask for her ideas of what they would like to do.

#### Avoid Elder Speak:

Your parents are not your children and will not respond well if you speak to them in a controlling manner. You may be convinced you have found the solution, but announcing what you have decided is disrespectful and will hinder the entire process. The last thing you want is your loved one to react negatively to your decision and that may taint relationships with you and any Caregiver who comes to the house. Don't dictate what needs to happen, but allow your loved one to see the logic of your suggestion. It is much better to include them in the conversation and really listen to their desires.

**Listen:**

Adult children on aging parents are busy and often think things need to happen on their schedule. The elderly operate at a much slower pace. Waiting quietly and patiently for an elderly parent to think things over can be difficult. Listen to what is said and try to understand their anxiety and fear of change. Let the idea of accepting help settle a bit and after some time re-approach the idea. A hard sell or nagging about using home health rarely works and since the goal is providing safety and independence at home, most elderly will soon realize that it is the preferred option to moving to an institution.



Kate McCarthy is Director of Operations for HomeAid Health Care which provides services for the elderly who wish to remain safe and independent at home. HomeAid is sister company to Prairie Home Assisted Living which has served the physical, spiritual, mental and health needs of their residents since 1999. Together the two companies provide comprehensive care for the elderly in the Fox Valley area of Wisconsin.