

What's a Geriatric Care Manager?

Barbara Zapotocky-Cook, DC

I received a call from a friend who was looking for someone to help her determine what her parents would need for living assistance in the future, and for a reference to a reliable estate planning attorney. There was one catch. My friend lives in Montana, while her parents live in Texas. No sweat! I gave her the number to the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers (GCMs).

A geriatric care manager is a person who has specialized training to provide care for older adults. Most GCMs hold graduate degrees in nursing, gerontology, psychology, social work or health and human services. A few have backgrounds in the financial service field, and all have an interest in working with older adults.

Geriatric care managers interface with family members and professionals in a variety of areas, such as legal services, health care, counseling and housing. Depending on their training, GCMs may provide assessments; placement; education; psychotherapy; counseling; advocacy; information and referral; crisis intervention; care management; entitlements; home care; insurance; and direction on guardianship or conservatorship.

The National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers evolved out of an earlier organization that was established in 1984. This organization boasts a membership of 1,100 professionals throughout the United States who work in a variety of aging-related settings. Approximately 20% of the membership carry liability insurance as geriatric care managers, but most carry liability insurance through their respective professional organizations. In addition, members must comply with relevant state and professional licensing and certification requirements as part of the GCM membership requirement.

During the course of treatment, patients frequently ask questions about aging issues that we are unable to answer. It is the forte of geriatric care managers to answer questions involving in-home assessments; care options; arranging for the payment of social security taxes; finding the best living arrangements; community resources; alerting children who live at a distance; estate planning; and other legal and financial issues. By being able to explain options, arrange for services, coordinate care and monitor the changing needs of individual clients, GCMs provide continuity and serve as valuable resources.

Geriatric care management fees are dependent upon the combination of services to be provided and the complexity of the individual situation. In the case of my friend and her parents, a typical scenario might play out as follows: The client contacts the national organization for a listing of GCM members in her area and requests an initial consultation with one (or several). The consultation is followed up by an agreement to perform a needs assessment, after which a meeting is scheduled between the GCM and the client(s) to discuss the findings. After the assessments are done, the GCM presents a range of care plan options, including a description of services that can be performed by the GCM.

A service agreement is made, and a service agreement contract is provided. The GCM should

furnish clients with a description of necessary services that help to clarify the issues involved in the elder's care management. The service agreement contract should describe the specific services to be provided and fees that will be charged. Flat fees may be charged for certain GCM services such as reference checks and interviews of attendants. It all depends on what the client selects and wishes the GCM to do.

If you are interested in learning more about these professionals and what they can do for your patients, you can write or call:

National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers 1604 North Country Club Road
Tucson, Arizona 85716 Tel: (520) 881-8008 Fax: (520) 325-7925

I will be heading back to Hawaii for awhile in the middle of June, so if you have further questions on the subject, you can write to me at 3030 Hibiscus Drive, Honolulu, HI 96815. I'll update you with my new e-mail address when I have one.

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