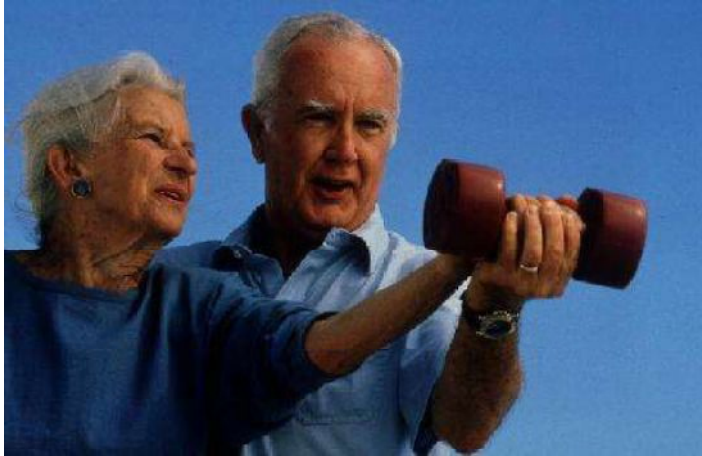


Aging with Grace & Dignity



Proactive steps to maintaining your independence and quality of life.

By Linda Ziac
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ONE THING WE CAN ALL BE SURE OF IS WE'RE AGING

While studies show that most seniors are healthy and function at high levels, it is inevitable that as we grow older, issues will surface related to our independence.

Meeting our current and evolving needs often requires a multi-disciplinary approach that encompasses many aspects of life such as healthcare, activities of daily living, transportation, finances, social, and emotional well being

To ensure the highest quality of life for the longest time possible, it is crucial that seniors, people with special needs and their loved ones begin a dialogue to discuss the topic of aging.

This process needs to focus on the person's hopes and desires, short and long term goals, and their abilities and needs; while at the same time establishing a spectrum of resources that will address unexpected events as well as their evolving needs.

MAINTAINING INDEPENDENCE WHILE BEING PRO-ACTIVE

No one looks forward to an unexpected personal or medical situation that catches them off guard; which can be an overwhelming, complex, time consuming and often costly experience.

The time for a person to plan for their aging in place is now, while they are still healthy, active and able to make decisions on their own. Developing a comprehensive well thought out written action plan, can help prevent unexpected events from morphing into a crisis, which has the potential to negatively impact on the person's health, safety, independence and quality of life. In the past, the only option seniors had for living outside of their home was a nursing home.

As with other parts of our body, our brain undergoes changes as we age. The mind remains one of the most mysterious parts of the human anatomy. It is part of our body - and yet it seems separate. It is where we store all of our memories, thoughts, feelings, abilities and sense of self.

Our mind is what makes us who we are, our personality, our sense of humor, our ability to communicate, our values. It is what makes us recognizable to other people.

Source: Parlay International

WHAT IS THE MIND?

The short answer is, "the brain." The brain is the primary controller of our central nervous system - the organ that tells our body what to do, that picks up and interprets signals from both in and outside our body. Made up of networks of neurons, the brain is a complex and ever-changing organ, and scientists have only begun to understand its mysteries.

Like our other body systems, the brain undergoes changes as we age - but for some people these changes are much more pronounced than for others.

Many people remain mentally alert their entire lives, while others eventually begin to suffer from a variety of mental disorders, including dementia, Alzheimer's Disease, and depression.

Why some people succumb to disorders and others do not is not entirely understood. New studies indicate that our neurons can regenerate, and ways to promote this are being researched.

DEGREES OF CHANGE

As most people age, they experience a slowing down of mental ability to some degree. They have mild forgetfulness and memory delays. It takes them longer to remember a name or the right word. It becomes more difficult to learn something new or to remember what they once knew. These symptoms are all part of the normal aging process and do not constitute a disorder.

For other people, the forgetfulness, memory delays and learning difficulties are more pronounced.

The general term for severely declining mental abilities is "dementia" - a term which applies to a range of conditions, including Alzheimer's Disease.

For people with dementia, everyday tasks become increasingly difficult and their minds become increasingly confused. In the latter stages of dementia or Alzheimer's, they may be completely unable to recognize themselves and others, and also unable to care for themselves.

The mind can also become susceptible with age to a variety of emotional disorders, including depression, aggression, paranoia and other ailments. Often these will accompany dementia, but they may also be experienced by themselves.

CARING FOR OUR MIND

Our minds, like our bodies, must be cared for. The mind is not a static organ; it responds to its environment, taking in and responding to stimulus.

Research indicates that the mind-body connection is extremely powerful and that keeping the mind healthy and engaged affects its ability to transmit and accept signals to and from the nervous system.

Most experts agree that mental stimulation as we age plays a vital role in keeping our minds alert.

According to Denise Park a psychological scientist and researcher at the University of Texas Dallas, "It seems it is not enough just to get out and do something -- it is important to get out and do something that is unfamiliar and mentally challenging, and that provides broad stimulation mentally and socially,"

Source: The Caregiver Resource Center

Currently, there are multiple options and each one has its own advantages and benefits.

In addition, there are a number of care options available for seniors who want to stay in their own home. If a person chooses to move out of their home, there are many different types of living arrangements and facilities.

The choices may seem overwhelming at first, but with a step by step approach, you can gather the necessary information leading you to what's best for you and your family.

How do you evaluate these many options, and make the best possible decision?

EVALUATE YOUR NEEDS AND DESIRES

The first step in the decision making process is to decide what types and what level of care the person needs. This can be done by first arranging for a geriatric assessment by a trained professional.

Out of the following care options, what does the person most need and want?

- Freedom from house and yard maintenance
- Prepared meals
- Transportation
- Privacy
- Arranged activities
- A basic apartment
- Socialization
- Full-time medical and supervisory care
- Assistance with bathing and grooming

- Assistance getting around
- Assistance remembering and taking medications

If possible, discuss and put together a list of the person's specific needs and desires. This list will help you and the care recipient get a fuller picture of what kind of care arrangements are needed.

RESEARCH YOUR OPTIONS

Now you are ready to research options and compare their features with your list of needs and desires.

Ask for recommendations from friends, speak with your doctor or other professional (e.g. certified case manager), or call your local Area Agency on Aging to get information about the different options in your area.

Most likely, you will find a variety of choices, and each one will offer distinctive features.

Keep in mind that depending on the specific situation, needed services may be provided in the home, day care program, assisted living facility, continuum of care facility or nursing home.

- If the senior would simply like a chance to socialize or you would like some respite time, it might be wise to consider local senior centers or elder day care options.
- If it is freedom from yard and house maintenance, qualified and screened people can be brought in to help, or a retirement community might be in order.
- If however, more help is needed; a caregiver, an assisted living facility or a nursing home may be an option.

You'll need to match up what each service has to offer, with the needs and desires of the senior.

PLAN VISITS

After focusing on the kind of services you're looking for, you will be able to narrow down your options considerably.

After ordering brochures or collecting other information, schedule a visit with the service provider or facility. Accompany the senior for these meetings, and come prepared with a list of questions, as well as your wishes and needs.

If you are considering a facility, an on-site visit is usually the best way to get a feel for the day to day operations of a facility.

Also, try to stop by unannounced to get a feel for how the facility runs when they aren't expecting a prospective resident or family to visit.

Keep in mind that many facilities will invite you to lunch or to recreational activities, as a way to get a better feel for the facility. Don't be afraid to ask.

THE CAREGIVER RESOURCE CENTER

“Serving the Community since 1990”

Each person is unique, and as a result each person has unique needs. Some people may experience mental and physical limitations that limit their level of functioning, while others will remain relatively high functioning.

The Caregiver Resource Center’s role is to work with the client, their family and healthcare professionals to help assess, plan for and implement ways to allow for their greatest degree of health, safety, independence, and quality of life.

This process involves identifying a client’s abilities and needs, and helping to design a care plan (road map) that is composed of a spectrum of services, that best meets the unique needs of that particular client.

Once a plan is in place, The Caregiver Resource Center is available to serve as the point person to monitor and coordinate services, and revise the plan as needed. This role is similar to the conductor of an orchestra; ensuring that there is good communication, teamwork, and that everyone remains focused on the desired goal.

Clients Whom We Serve

Individuals and families dealing with:

- Developmental Disabilities
- Mental Health Issues
- Physical Disabilities
- Chronic Conditions
- Aging and the Elderly
- Speech Impairments
- Cognitive Limitations
- Spinal Cord Injury

Some Benefits of Our Services

- Well respected company serving the community since 1990
- All services are individually designed to meet the unique needs of the client
- We are available 7 days a week by appointment, and 24/7 for emergencies
- Professional support & guidance
- Our services may be provided on-site in the home, doctor’s office, ER, hospital, assisted living facility, or nursing home

Our Menu of Services

All services are individually designed to meet the unique needs of the client and their loved ones.

1. Advocacy
2. Screening, arranging for and monitoring Care Services
3. Home Safety Audit
4. Discuss and Plan for Future Challenges – “the what ifs”
5. Emergency Medical Advocacy while in the ER or hospital
6. Transitioning to an alternative living option (e.g. home to assisted living)
7. Referrals to Specialists (e.g. medical, legal, or financial professionals)
8. Family Support & Guidance
9. Insurance Claims Research & Assistance
10. Research of Community Resources
11. Family Discussions and Issue Mediation
12. Crisis Management
13. Many more services...

Photo from The Printshop

The information in this article is provided as an information resource only, and is not to be used or relied on for any diagnostic or treatment purposes. This information is not intended to be patient education, does not create any patient provider relationship, and should not be used as a substitute for professional diagnosis and treatment.

Please consult your health care provider for an appointment, before making any healthcare decisions or for guidance about a specific medical condition.

Linda Ziac is the owner and founder of The Caregiver Resource Center. The Caregiver Resource Center is a division of Employee Assistance Professionals, Inc., which Linda founded in October 1990. The Caregiver Resource Center provides a spectrum of concierge case management and advocacy services for seniors, people with special needs and families.

Linda's professional career spans more than 40 years in the health and mental health field as a CT Licensed Professional Counselor, CT Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselor, Board Certified Employee Assistance Professional, Board Certified Case Manager, and Board Certified Dementia Practitioner. In addition, Ms. Ziac has 15 years of experience coordinating care for her own parents.

Linda assists seniors, people with special needs and their families; in planning for and implementing ways to allow for the greatest degree of health, safety, independence, and quality of life. Linda meets with individuals and family members to assess their needs, and develop a Care Team, while working with members of the Team to formulate a comprehensive Care Plan (a road map).

Once a plan is in place, Linda is available to serve as the point person to monitor and coordinate services, and revise the plan as needed. This role is similar to the conductor of an orchestra; ensuring that there is good communication, teamwork, and that everyone remains focused on the desired goal.

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