



Care Providers: Important Members of Your Care Team

A conversation with Kate Granigan, Geriatric Care Manager

What is a care provider?

A care provider is any person helping to provide personal and medical care to an individual. Doctors have a primary role in making a diagnosis and prescribing medicines and treatments, but an individual may need the care of other providers to stay healthy and maintain a good quality of everyday life. It can help to think of care providers in two categories:

Formal care providers are professional people who assist with personal and medical care such as a nurse, a physical or mental health therapist, a home health aide, a geriatric care manager, a social worker, or a non-medical companion, etc.

Informal care providers are the people in an individual's life who are not paid but provide essential care and support such as family members, friends, neighbors, clergy, and co-workers, etc. Family members are also called caregivers providing daily or occasional care.

What do care providers do?

Care providers, both formal and informal, are an important part of an individual's health care team. Formal care providers can provide 1). medical assistance like giving medications, providing therapy, and monitoring health, 2). personal care such as helping with daily living needs like bathing, dressing, and nutrition, and 3). help with emotional, social, and financial concerns. Informal care providers can offer a wide range of support from daily care to providing transportation, companionship, spiritual support, and advocating to ensure an individual's rights are respected. Care providers can help people age at home or in a continuing care facility, and can help solve problems and manage day-to-day challenges.

Can a care provider help figure out what care is needed?

Yes. There are agencies and professionals called care managers who can help assess the kind of care an individual needs, make recommendations, and arrange for appropriate services. For example, a Geriatric Care Manager can be the hub of the wheel in assisting older adults and persons with disabilities to find the right care. Care Managers help empower their clients to express their choices and preferences for care, and then look for the best match that respects their wishes.



How can a care provider help provide the right care all through my life?

Care providers can act as a guide to help find the right care at every stage of health. I tell my clients they are the experts in their care and to trust their instincts. I want to know if something doesn't feel right about the care they are getting, even if they don't have the exact words to describe it. Your health will change overtime, so making adjustments that are right for an individual is a critical part of empowerment and honoring choices. Care providers understand that what is considered good care in one phase of health, may not be effective in the next phase of health. Different kinds of care and/or different care providers may be needed. We constantly evaluate and adjust the care as a person progresses through life.

What prevents an individual and families from getting necessary care?

Sometimes the problem is not knowing where or how to start to find care providers. Often I find there is a fear or worry that delays people from reaching out for help. Fear is pretty common with a loss of control and independence, and not knowing what the future will bring. There may be a risk of upsetting family members in asking for help or in some cases the fear that you won't be helped if you ask. What people come to realize is that we all need help at different phases of our lives. A doctor can provide the first step of a diagnosis and prescribing a course of treatment. As part of an individual's health care team, care providers can assist with medical, personal, emotional and financial issues that arise as part of daily care.

How can an individual and families find the right care?

You might start a conversation with a care provider by saying, "This is not working as well as it used to, and I'd like to talk about how this can work better for me and for the family." As a Care Manager, that's all I really need to know and we'll figure out the rest together. I see asking for help as a show of strength. We help people take control of their situations, instead of having things fall apart. Being proactive about your care and getting some help to address an issue can also avoid making the problem bigger or getting into a crisis situation.

When is the best time to contact a care provider?

People sometimes think it's too early to ask for help if they need only occasional assistance, or they feel they waited too long to get help and now it's no longer available. We take people where they are and work with individuals and families to create the care that's right for the individual no matter their stage of health. There is never a wrong time. However, the more proactive a person is in getting early care, the more options they might have that can be tailored to their choices and preferences. Care providers are there and ready when you choose.

Biography

Kate Granigan, MSW, LICSW, C-ASWCM, is Vice President of Care Management, Overlook CARE. Ms. Granigan is a licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker and a Certified Advanced Social Work Case Manager. Ms. Granigan is active in the eldercare community serving as a current Board Member of Massachusetts Guardianship Association, past President of the New England Chapter of NAPGCM, a former Board Member for the Scituate Council on Aging and the Education Committee of South Shore Coalition of Workers with the Elderly.