

When you become the parent of your parent

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Professional Geriatric Case Manager

The Sandwich Generation is a generation of people who care for their aging parents while supporting their own families. The Sandwich Generation is officially registered within the National Special Events Registry as an annual national observance.

When “Mary” first contacted me, she was exhausted and overwhelmed, and felt guilty she wasn’t doing enough to help her parent. She had noticed her mother was wearing the same clothes and was not able to keep the house up like she used to. With a closer look, it became apparent that she wasn’t cooking meals, she had missed several appointments and there was a disconnect notice for the lights. Mary has been struggling to balance the needs of her mother while trying to juggle work, raise her children, and continue to maintain her own home.

“Ellen” called when her family was in crisis. Dad had fallen and was being checked out at the ER. He was fine, so was being released to home but with instructions that he shouldn’t be left alone. Ellen had two siblings who were willing to help but they all worked and had families. They did their best to coordinate schedules and take turns but were getting physically exhausted. Ellen felt like she had the weight of the world on her shoulders trying to coordinate the schedules with her siblings, running to get groceries for her Dad and her own family, and dropping the kids off at soccer practice. Her own health was beginning to be affected.

David called from another state. He had recently been home to see his parents and was worried they weren’t able to manage like they use to. They both were becoming forgetful and were having difficulty getting around. He was concerned about whether they were eating ok and taking their medications correctly. With winter coming, he was concerned about their driving to the store. Even though he’s been calling daily and they both say everything is fine, he is trying to schedule more frequent trips home. David is an only child and has a high position in his company with a lot of responsibility. He and his wife



share in the care of their twins, because his wife is taking evening classes to finish her nursing degree. The constant worry and stress about his parents’ needs are beginning to affect his work and his family life.

Each of these stories have a common thread - identifying a Sandwich Generation that is trying to figure out how to help aging parents while managing their own career and work schedule, along with continuing to raise their children and manage their own household. With increased demands on time, energy, health and finances, it can place a strain on a marriage and the relationships with one’s kids. One feels torn between the needs of their own family and the needs of this or her parents and are often left with feelings of inadequacy.

The major issues facing the Sandwich Generation include: time and energy to take care of the needs of both which could include maintaining two households — getting groceries, preparing meals, doing laundry, making sure appointments are kept and medications are managed, transportation, paying the bills, and trying to split time between spouse and children — and aging parents.

If you are noticing a decline in the physical or mental health of a parent or you are asking yourself any of the following questions: Are

my loved ones safe at home? Are bills being paid on time? Are their health concerns and other issues becoming larger and more complex than what I can comfortably manage? Are the demands and responsibilities becoming so great that I am having difficulty providing the level of supervision and attention they need — then you might consider calling on a professional.

A Professional Geriatric Care Manager is specially trained to assess the situation and identify problems; develop a plan; make recommendations about services; arrange for and monitor services in the home or another setting; and act as a liaison for families who live a distance or out of state. Sometimes, they are called in to work with families, physicians, attorneys and guardians to help assess, plan and coordinate care while maintaining the dignity and respect of the person needing assistance. The Professional Geriatric Care Manager looks at the entire picture and examines each problem and stressor; assesses the capabilities and strengths of the individual, and makes recommendations for a plan that will address the current needs while also planning for the future. The bigger picture looks at health and medical needs; functional capabilities and limitations; the social support system; cognition and emotional well-being; home

safety; the financial picture to meet one’s current and future needs; and discussing the legal documents that might be needed.

The NAPGCM Website at: www.caremanager.org provides information on finding and selecting a Professional Geriatric Care Manager. The website lists frequently asked questions; articles on specific area’s like dementia and caregiving; and how to find a care manager in your area. Whether your parents are nearby or live in another state, you can locate a professional to guide you through the process of what’s available for services and the eligibility guidelines for funding or financial assistance, if needed.

In central Maine, Peg Soucy, a licensed social worker and certified care manager, has been working in the healthcare field for over 30 years. Peg is the owner of Elder Care Planning and Solutions, located at 120 Drummond Ave in Waterville. She reports she has seen an increase in the Sandwich Generation seeking her services for a consultation in order to understand what’s covered by insurance; what resources are in the area; and what things should they start thinking about as they see their parents aging. A consultation opens the door and provides guidance on how to have a meaningful conversation with one’s parents that may involve future decisions about

their care and where they would want to live.

Soucy also travels to Farmington, Bangor, Brunswick and the Rockland areas (to name a few) in order to provide rural elders and families with in home assessments to help identify needs, create a safe plan and match the resources needed to help people stay in their homes for as long as possible. Soucy has also helped people with exploring the various options for alternative living arrangements, when needed. In recent months, Soucy has assisted a gentleman who lost his spouse, with relocating from Maine to California to be in an assisted living facility near his sons. State-to-state transfers are not unusual for Soucy who often receives calls from out of state relatives looking for guidance and assistance. Another elderly man who was diagnosed with a terminal illness told his family it was important for him to get back in his area so he could be near family and friends. Soucy was able to coordinate with physicians on either end, and with the nursing home and Hospice agency, to have everything in place when he arrived home by Air Ambulance.

Soucy said her passion comes from her desire to have everyone treated with dignity and respect, and to be given the best quality of life possible.