

## **Caring Conversations: A New Family Dialog**

During my client reviews I foster a discussion that I call Caring Conversations™ sessions. These intergenerational dialogues focus specifically on care planning, which is one of the most significant conversations that can occur within any family unit.

During these discussions we don't talk about long-term care insurance or Title 19 planning. Rather, we focus on the family unit's attitudes, values and beliefs about caring for aging family members. We examine the individual desires of each family member – how they want to see care delivered to and/or received from their loved ones. It is only after having the more strategic Caring Conversations and identifying life style choices based on overall family objectives that can we focus on appropriate financial and estate planning tactics.

My own experience with this subject comes from two perspectives. One of my perspectives is as a financial advisor working with clients and their families for many years. The other comes from the privilege of serving as the primary caregiver for terminally ill family members three times in my own life. I learned about the real life issues that families face through professional and personal experience.

Questions such as will mom or dad receive care in home or in an institutional setting. Are there family resources available to provide care for the aging member? Those resources include time, talent and/or skill in health care, ability to coordinate service providers and, of course, money. If care will be delivered in an institutional setting, what facilities best fit the needs of the family as well as the resident? No matter what venue--home or institutional care--family needs must be considered. When will or should the change from home living to institutional care take place? If the transition is to independent living or assisted living, does the facility have a full nursing care facility who will also work for the family? It is best for the facility to be close enough for family members to conveniently visit and provide support for the resident family member.

I have experienced that families rarely have these discussions before a crisis event and then the discussion is usually hijacked by the immediate needs created by the crisis – mom or dad took a fall and are now in the hospital and may need long term care – what do we do? Conversations about care are often difficult and uncomfortable for families, so I encourage and facilitate this dialog with my clients through Caring Conversations before a crisis event forces the inevitable issue at an even more emotional time.

As our society continues to age, alternatives to institutional care will continue to evolve. One care model that I believe will become popular again is the intergenerational family unit which offers specially designed housing to allow family members to maintain their independent space with a shared space for support and care.

One friend of mine has created this environment in a two-family home with an added family room and attached efficiency apartment as a third unit or mother-in-law suite. Two of the three units are handicap accessible and will facilitate home health care services when needed. She lives in one unit, her retired mother lives in another and her disabled brother lives in the third. This arrangement affords each of them their own space, but they share the common family room, complete with a fireplace and hot tub for relaxing together or separately.

This is just one example of a unique caring arrangement especially designed around the needs of family members. I believe more families need to have dialogue to help them arrive at the best arrangement for their situation before crisis limits their choices.

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