

## OFFERING Relief

## A HELPING HAND FOR ELDER LAW ATTORNEYS

Geriatric care managers can put support systems in place

By MARLENE DUBE

Martin, an 82-year old veteran with advanced Alzheimer's disease, quite literally kept his attorney up at night. Phone calls from the police, who picked Martin up when he was found wandering on Hartford streets, and frantic calls from Martin's elderly spouse and daughter who lived in Iowa, were becoming more frequent. This elder law attorney, who had been appointed Martin's conservator of person and estate, wondered how long he could possibly manage this difficult, demanding case and still keep up with his regular workload. There was never enough time to address the family's continual crises.

The solution? Martin's elder law attorney decided to utilize the services of a professional geriatric care manager. The care manager, a social worker certified in care management and knowledgeable about community resources, first conducted a comprehensive assessment of Martin's

medical and social needs. She then developed a plan of care, and with the attorney's authorization, coordinated the services Martin required to live safely at home. Her recommendations included an adult day-



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care program with a dementia specialty that would keep Martin engaged in activities, medication monitoring, a "safe return bracelet," and suggestions to make the home environment safer.

She arranged for transportation to the adult day program, respite for the relatives caring for Martin, and assisted the family with long-term planning in the event he could no longer remain at home. Much to

the attorney's relief, his client now had the support systems in place that he needed. The emergency phone calls were over.

Private geriatric care management is a valuable option for attorneys whose older

service delivery on the part of the attorney. Working with a geriatric care manager provides the following benefits for attorneys:

**Enhanced client satisfaction, thus increasing referrals:** Working closely with an attorney, the geriatric care manager can evaluate the elderly client's needs, screen for risk factors, and ensure that the most appropriate services are in place. This not only assists the client but can provide peace of mind and respite for the family. Meeting or exceeding clients' expectations is not only good customer service, it makes good business sense. Satisfied customers are more likely to make referrals, provide free advertising in the form of positive feedback to others about the attorney, and are potential sources of additional revenue.

**Expert Testimony**

**Reduced liability and greater certainty regarding clients' plans of care:** With the recent changes in conservatorship law, the expert testimony of a qualified, experienced geriatric care manager can be of great value in probate court. Difficult client situations may require the involvement of outside professionals, especially in cases of diminished capacity or when the potential for abuse exists. The attorney who is conservator of a client with complicated medical and psycho-social needs can call upon a geriatric care manager to review the plan of care and offer his/her professional opinion. In cases where families are in conflict, the attorney or probate judge can recommend an objective assessment by a seasoned geriatric care manager. Fees for geriatric care management services average \$125 to \$150 per hour.

**Greater time efficiencies:** Attorneys whose elderly clients are in crisis may find themselves and their staff spending a great deal of time and effort trying to locate resources and act as social workers. The geriatric care manager relieves that burden, particularly in cases when the attorney is appointed conservator. If the client has no family, the care manager can assist the client with medical appointments, social activities, appropriate living arrangements, and whatever else the client needs to live as independently as possible. In addition, the geriatric care manager can monitor the client's care over time and make adjustments to the care plan as needed. Close communication between the care manager and the attorney ensures that the attorney is kept well-informed of the client's status. Without the responsibility of case management, the attorney is free to focus on the client's legal affairs and his/her domains of expertise.

As the baby boomers grow older and an increasing number of people live to advanced ages in the United States, the field of geriatric care management will continue to grow and play an important role in the legal arena. Attorneys who specialize in elder law have more opportunities than ever to enhance their practices and best serve their clients. ■

## Many geriatric care managers are licensed nurses, social workers, or other human services professionals

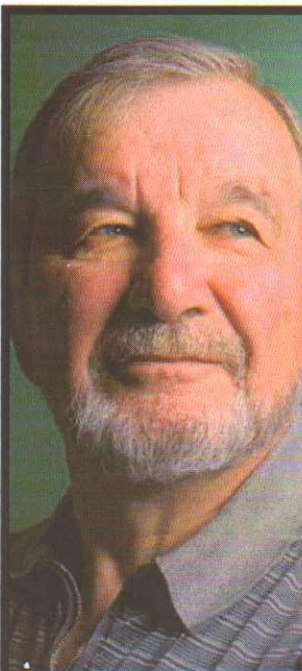
clients have complicated eldercare issues, or whose families disagree about their care. In addition, probate courts often request the objective assessment of a qualified geriatric care manager when a determination must be made about nursing home placement. Geriatric care managers can provide expert testimony in probate court hearings regarding their opinion of the client's status and recommendations for care. The attorney knows the law, but not necessarily how an elderly client's medical and social needs are most effectively addressed.

**Eyes And Ears**

Who provides geriatric care management? Many geriatric care managers are licensed nurses, social workers, or other human services professionals who are trained to conduct comprehensive psychosocial assessments.

National certification in care management demonstrates that the individual has had specific training and experience in eldercare. To be truly effective, the geriatric care manager must have a solid knowledge base regarding community-based service options, state and federal entitlements, and be able to navigate the maze of available health care services and programs. For long-distance caregivers, the geriatric care manager can be the "eyes and ears" for the family and assist clients to remain as independent as possible, for as long as possible. Even individuals in assisted living facilities or in other institutional settings can benefit from the services and advocacy of a geriatric care manager.

As a resource to attorneys, the geriatric care manager can recommend plans of care for clients with complex needs, coordinate in-home services and advise the attorney and family regarding the most appropriate, cost-effective living arrangements for the client. In addition, the geriatric care manager serves as a liaison with all involved professionals, and provides support and education on eldercare to the client and family. All of this translates to a higher quality of life for the client, and enhanced



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