G A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BAL
NDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A
CE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FIN

MFS® HeritagePlanning℠

Helping Yourself•Helping Your Parents•Helping Your Children℠

info sheet Talking It Over With Your Elder's Physician

Courtesy of:

It isn't always easy to know when an elder's health problems are the result of normal aging and when they're the result of a more serious condition. For example, your parent may be having difficulty sleeping, is skipping meals, and has developed a persistent rash with no history of skin problems. What should you do? Do you let the situation be and hope it will work out? Do you assume your parent will call the doctor? Do you intervene? If so, how?

Such situations are more common than we realize. We do not want to interfere with our parent's life but, at the same time, we are concerned about his/her well-being. The saying, "It's better to be safe than sorry," aptly applies to these circumstances and, therefore, it is timely to contact the doctor when these questions arise. Most doctors are eager to have the cooperation of family members, recognizing that the family often takes most of the responsibility for seeing that their instructions are carried out.

Establish a Relationship

Having a meaningful doctor/patient relationship requires honesty and openness from both parties. Encourage your older relative to tell the doctor about any symptoms and why s/he is worried about them. It is possible that some of their fears are unfounded. For example, s/he may be experiencing changes in bowel habits and fear that colon cancer will be diagnosed, when the problem may simply be related to a lack of exercise and fluid intake. To gain an accurate understanding of your relative's health, care, and treatments, you will also want to establish an on-going relationship with the doctor.

If you are taking your older relative to doctor's appointments, you will have the opportunity to join him/her in the treatment room and talk to the doctor yourself. If not, it will be helpful for you to make an appointment with the doctor to discuss your relative's health care. (You may have to pay for an office visit, but the peace of mind you receive will be well worth it.)

To prepare for talking with your relative's doctor, it is important for you and your parent to discuss the situation beforehand, if possible. The older person who is actively involved in his/her health care is more likely to be committed to following the doctor's recommendations. Cover these points with the doctor:

- Let the doctor know you are involved with your parent's care and want to be contacted whenever changes occur.
- Alert the doctor regarding when and where you are most readily available and request the same of the doctor.
- Do not assume the doctor knows what you know. Inform the doctor of your parent's medical history, medications, and other pertinent information.
- Ask the doctor to explain any information that is unclear to you.

This material is not intended to replace the advice of a qualified attorney, tax adviser, financial adviser, or insurance agent. Before making any financial commitment regarding the issues discussed here, consult with the appropriate professional adviser. This material was prepared by Ceridian Performance Partners; accordingly CPP (not MFS Fund Distributors, Inc.) is solely responsible for the accuracy of the content.

G A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BAL
NDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A
CE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FIN

info sheet Talking It Over With Your Elder's Physician/2

Speak Up

To prepare for the discussion, it is helpful for you and your parent to write down any questions and topics you'd like to cover before the doctor's visit to ensure they are addressed. As many people often do, your relative may not always tell the doctor the whole story. For example, s/he may give you a detailed description of symptoms or side effects and then tell the doctor, "Oh, I'm fine."

Consider the following ways to actively participate during the appointment:

- Ask questions about anything and everything you do not understand.
- Point out any problems or side effects from medications that your parent may be experiencing (call the doctor immediately, if you feel it's necessary). If you are unsure of the side effects of each of his/her medications, ask for a detailed explanation.
- Encourage your parent to make his/her wishes known. This is a good time for you to voice your concerns as well.
- Clarify points during the discussion to obtain a mutual understanding of the issues. Medical language can often be confusing. The doctor may think that you comprehend what s/he has said if you don't raise questions.
- Write down the doctor's instructions as s/he speaks so there can be no mistakes in carrying them out. Anyone can become confused: you may ask, "Now, did the doctor say you should come back in three or six months?" or your elder may question, "Am I supposed to continue with these pills when I start the new ones or not?"
- If your elder isn't following or can't follow the doctor's instructions, share this with the doctor. Informing the doctor about what directions are unclear provides him/her with the opportunity to reclarify, devise an alternative plan, and/or re-emphasize the importance of the recommended treatment plan and how it will benefit your parent.

Be Prepared

There may come a time when your older relative requires hospitalization, whether planned or unplanned. It may be for a needed surgical procedure, a few simple tests, or it may be in response to an emergency. In each situation, ask for clarification of the following information:

- What tests are expected?
- What procedures are involved?
- What is the estimated length of the hospital stay?
- What side effects of anesthesia, medications, and surgical procedures can be expected?
- What limitations will your relative have after release from the hospital?
- What changes will need to be made in his/her plan of care, living arrangements, or on-going medical treatment?

In order to keep a clear picture of your parent's overall health, treatments, and medications, you and your parent may want to maintain a readily accessible file with all of their important medical information. This file can assist health care professionals in the event of an emergency. Update both files as changes occur, so the information is current and accurate.

Elders Are People, Too

Most older people can speak for themselves. Encouraging your parent to share questions and concerns with the doctor will more likely result in his/her active participation in the treatment plan, and thus, maintain a sense of control over what is happening to him/her. If your relative is unable to speak, have him/her write down questions so you can accurately represent the concerns. It is easy to overlook making eye contact with the elder when s/he is unable to speak. If you notice the doctor directing

G A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BAL
NDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A
CE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FINDING A BALANCE • FIN

info sheet Talking It Over With Your Elder's Physician/3

most of the eye contact to you, look over to your parent regularly to ensure the doctor establishes and maintains eye contact with him/her.

Your older relative's doctor needs to know their specific preferences about options for life-saving medical treatment, such as resuscitation, chemotherapy, feeding tubes, and ventilators. Such options are known as Advanced Medical Directives or Health Care Proxies and can be kept in their medical file for reference in the event your parent is unable to make decisions regarding his/her medical treatment.

Keep the Doctor Informed

If you notice gradual or sudden changes in your parent's behavior or physical/mental functioning, alert the doctor. If your relative is not able or willing to describe the changes, you may want to call the doctor to discuss your concerns.

When you or your parent are not satisfied with their medical care, say so. For example, you may feel your relative is not being taken seriously with the presented symptoms or may have tried three medications with no relief. Try not to rationalize your dissatisfaction — these are legitimate concerns that should be addressed with the doctor. In addition, when a doctor says, "Nothing more can be done," s/he often means, "There's nothing more I can do." Always ask for the name of someone else who could help, such as a counselor, physical therapist, or hospice worker.

Conclusion

Whether an older person's health problems are cause for alarm or not isn't always clear. The vital link to determining this can often be the relationship you and your parent have with his/her doctor. This partnership should be one in which all persons communicate well, understand and respect each other's feelings and beliefs, and have the same ultimate goal — the health and well-being of your older relative. Stand firm on your parent receiving a thorough evaluation and treatment for medical problems that are concerning either of you. You want your parent to remain healthy and to know treatment options are available for any health problems. By encouraging your relative to be committed to and involved in his/her own health care, you directly engage him/her in gaining prompt attention for any symptoms or illnesses, practicing preventive health care, and ensuring the quality of life s/he deserves.

Resources for Further Information

Butler, Kurt, and Lynn Rayner, M.D. **The New Handbook of Health and Preventive Medicine.** Prometheus Books, 1990, 450 p., $20.95. To order, call 1-800-421-0351.

Pritikin, Enid, and Trudy Reese. **Parentcare Survival Guide: Helping Your Folks Through the Not-So-Golden Years.** Barron's Educational Series, 1993, 211 p., $8.95. Call 1-800-645-3476 to order.

Rob, Caroline, R.N., with Janet Reynolds, G.N.P. **The Caregiver's Guide: Helping Elderly Relatives Cope with Health and Safety Problems.** Houghton Mifflin, 1992, 458 p., $15.00. Call 1-800-225-3362 to order.

The Administration on Aging offers information and resources for caregivers and elders. Visit their site on the world wide web at http://www.aoa.dhhs.gov.

For more information or a list of other MFS Heritage Planning educational materials on helping your parents, your children, or yourself, contact your financial adviser.

M F S®
INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT
MFS Fund Distributors, Inc., 500 Boylston St., Boston, MA 02116 H0320598.pdf