

1/21/09
column

Ask A Care Manager...

My mother is fiercely independent but is having trouble remembering. I want to support her wish to be independent but I worry when she needs help. What should I do?

It's important to recognize that we all want to be independent and run our own lives. However, sometimes that becomes increasingly difficult when we can't remember how to use the telephone, cook our meals, and remember important appointments. Your mother needs a formal diagnosis regarding her health and memory loss. Her doctor may be able to prescribe medication to help slow the process. You want to make sure she's safe and able to take care of her day to day needs. You'll want to talk with her about her daily routine and pop in unannounced to see if she's eating, paying bills, and attending to her personal care needs.

My father is 87 years old and has been diagnosed with moderate Alzheimer's disease after a recent MRI. He's adamant about continuing to drive but the doctor has told him he cannot. He only drives to the grocery store and does just fine. Should I let him continue?

In California physicians must notify Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) whenever a patient has a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease. DMV will send your father a letter requiring him to come in for a written and driving test or may revoke his driver's license through the mail. This may upset your father knowing he will be unable to drive anymore but may save his life and someone else's because he's no longer behind the wheel.

My parents have bank accounts at several local banks and are very private about their resources. My father pays all the bills and my mother has always deferred to his decisions about money. My father has dementia and forgets where his accounts are. He's beginning to accuse other family members of stealing his money when in fact, he forgets what he has where. How can we help without making my father angry?

It's important for your mother to begin to understand the finances in this relationship. If your father dies first, it will be her responsibility to take this on. Encourage her to look over the bank statements when they come in the mail. See what bills come in and need to be paid. Suggest she talk with your Dad about wanting to learn this "just in case something happens to him". Recommend your mother take notes writing everything down. She can then discuss these things with you or one of your siblings for another opinion. Make sure the person with the dementia is not in the position of selling the family home, car or other property to some unscrupulous individual.

My wife loves to buy things. Although she doesn't use half what she buys, she is forever ordering over the Home Shopping Network, specials coming in the mail, and anyone who comes to the door. When the items come, she doesn't remember ordering them and I'm stuck trying to send them back or worse yet, paying for them. How can I stop this behavior?

If your wife has been diagnosed with memory impairment, she probably doesn't remember making the purchase. She may think it is a gift when it arrives at her door and may be angry if you insist on

returning it. Don't make an issue at the time but mail it back once it's out of her sight. You're going to have to monitor her purchases. You may want to try and divert her from watching TV and ordering items. Don't let her have access to credit cards or give her a card that's maxed out. Go through the mail before she sees it and throw away the "free" offers that will cost you money. Finally, write a form letter asking to be removed from the "call" list. Say the individual is no longer competent, sign it as her spouse, make a copy and send to all junk mail offers. Be firm in your letter and eventually, they will quit calling and sending items through the mail. You can also write "Refuse" with your signature and return if it's not been opened.

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