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Member, National Academy
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SENIOR FAMILY MEMBERS' ISSUES SURFACE DURING THE HOLIDAYS

Oast & Hook received the following information from Shirley McGee with Home Sweet Home Care in Smithfield, Virginia. We share this information with the readers of the *Elder Law News*, and we thank Ms. McGee for her input.

Baby boomers visiting senior family members during the holidays may be in for a shocking surprise. The pristine house and yard of the past now look shabby and neglected. Dirty dishes fill the sink, and the kitchen table is covered in crumbs. Unopened bills are stacked haphazardly all over the countertops. Mom seems unfocused, and Dad is having trouble getting around. It's clear that help is needed, but what should family members do? Clients are encouraged to take advantage of the time when everyone is gathered together, to initiate a conversation with parents and family members about "what if" scenarios and health and financial concerns. Historically, the week after Thanksgiving generates more requests from anxious relatives to senior organizations than any other week of the year. The holidays are a good time for family members to be alert for signs that senior relatives may need help – physical, mental or financial. The most important thing is to look for signs of change in mood, health, and living conditions. Checking in with people who visit the relative frequently can indicate whether there have been recent changes.

Some signs to look for include:

- Personal hygiene problems;
- Home in disarray or needing to be cleaned;
- Weight loss or weight gain – check for spoiled food or insufficient food at home;
- Failure to manage medications or medical appointments;
- Increased difficulty with mobility like climbing stairs or using a bathtub;

- Changes in judgment, mood, or overall behavior;
- Increased forgetfulness – check for unopened mail or unread newspapers;
- Missed bill payments or other financial difficulties;
- Unusual or extravagant purchases that are out of character; and
- Decreased social activities or failing to maintain friendships.

It isn't necessary to panic if you recognize a few changes; some are simply part of the aging process. Slowing down does not automatically mean that your family members are ready to move to an assisted living facility or in with you. This is a good time to talk about concerns and ask seniors what kind of help they would like. Start researching the options. There are many organizations that can provide expert advice about a range of senior services from home health aides, visiting nurses, Meals on Wheels, and adult day care, to firms such as Oast & Hook, who can advise regarding financial planning and legal issues. While you are visiting with your senior family members, take a look around and learn more about the community where they live. Visit facilities, contact senior organizations, take notes, and start a file so you will know whom to call when something needs to be done. Keep adding to it, and soon you will be able to treat your family members to home-delivered meals or arrange for a senior companion to take your family members to meetings and special events. When you return home, check out some of the websites offering devices that can help safeguard your family members and ease your worries. Video monitors, for example, enable you to keep an eye on how your family members are coping, and automated medication carousels ensure that they are taking their medications in the right dosage and at the right time.

One of the most difficult aspects of dealing with aging family members is coping with siblings, other family members, and outsiders. Everybody has an opinion or an agenda. Take the lead and encourage everyone in your family to listen closely and patiently to one another, respond with respect, keep a sense of humor, and stay focused on the prize – providing your senior family members with the best possible quality of life.

The attorneys at Oast & Hook are available to assist clients and their families with their long-term care, financial and estate planning needs.



All of us at Oast & Hook wish you a happy holiday season and a healthy 2008!

Oast & Hook

Oast & Hook is an elder law firm. We represent older persons, disabled persons, their families, and their advocates. The practice of elder law includes estate planning, investment and insurance advice, estate and trust administration, powers of attorney, advance medical directives, titling of assets and designations of beneficiaries, guardianships, conservatorships, and public entitlements such as Medicaid, Medicare, Social Security, and SSI, disability planning, income tax planning and preparation, bill paying, account management and reporting, care management, and fiduciary services. We also handle litigation involving these issues, such as will contests and estate administration disputes. For more information about Oast & Hook, please visit our website at www.oasthook.com.

Oast & Hook is a Virginia member of the Special Needs Alliance, a nationwide network of disability attorneys. As members of this alliance, we assist personal injury attorneys in resolving their cases to enhance the judgments and awards of their disabled clients and to maintain the eligibility of these clients for SSI and Medicaid. We are experienced in protecting the public benefits of persons with special needs and in assisting with the management of their assets. For more information about the Special Needs Alliance, visit its website at www.specialneedsalliance.com.

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