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MEMBER



Special needs require special lawyers.

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THE CAREGIVER'S PRISON BY LETHA SGRITTA MCDOWELL

As the baby boomers age, more of them are providing care for their elderly loved ones. In some instances, the care is obvious, for example, assisting with daily activities such as bathing and dressing. In other instances, the care is slightly less formal and involves things such as meal preparation and medication management. Sometimes caregiving simply involves concern over the aging loved one's well-being and checking to make sure this loved one is OK. The people who provide this care do so out of love, respect, and a sense of duty. But everyone, care providers and care recipients alike, underestimates the mental stress and physical toll that providing this care can take on the caregiver.

Most people involved in a caregiving relationship will not admit the level of stress involved; however, almost everyone who works with older adults can identify the signs of caregiver stress. For those who are in a caregiving relationship it is critical to recognize stress and burnout before they become problematic and develop strategies to combat this stress. What many caregivers do not realize is that if then they burn out, then they will not be able to provide care and support to their loved ones. As a result, they will undermine all of the time, effort, and energy that they have put into their caregiving thus far.

A recent AARP study revealed a "caregiver's wish list." At the top of the list was tax relief in the form of a tax credit for providing care for a loved one. The next most requested item was payment for providing care such as a minimum wage. Significantly, caregivers requested respite in the form of time off or relief by having someone coordinate transportation and medical appointments. The bottom line is that caregivers are asking for financial assistance and a little time off.

If you are in a caregiving relationship, then you need to recognize the importance of these items. Many assisted living facilities allow a respite stay, giving the caregiver a short break. The addition of a small amount of

in-home care for your loved one, can alleviate some of the burden. Often aging family members can pay their caregivers a small wage for the care they provide, as long as the pay is pursuant to a legal agreement.

If you are considering starting a caregiving arrangement, then you should come up with a plan to combat these concerns before the caregiving starts. Be aware of available resources such as support groups and web resources including www.caregiverstress.com. The Alzheimer's Association provides fantastic resources for those caring for those with Alzheimer's disease or dementia.

It is also important to develop a support system for the caregiver. Family members should work together and divide the responsibilities as much as possible. If there are no other individuals who are willing to help, then be prepared to request assistance through a home health care agency. You should also inform your employer that you are a caregiver. Studies show that 66% of caregivers have been late, left early, or taken time off due to care providing. Letting your employer know in advance that you may need to take time off to take care of family responsibilities will allow them to have the chance to work with you to accommodate your schedule rather than leaving your employer in a bad position when caregiving causes problems for you at work.

Please remember that caregiving does not stop if a loved one enters a facility. Family members still visit the aging person in the facility, run errands such as shopping, and coordinate and attend doctor's appointments.

Finally, as a caregiver it is important to realize that you should "never say never." Many caregivers want to keep their loved ones from entering facility care; however, that is not always a reasonable position. Eighty percent of all individuals need facility level care at some point in their lives. Facility care provides 24 hour a day trained medical staffing. Few caregivers have the medical training and level of knowledge of an assisted living or nursing facility. Even if caregivers have that training and level of knowledge, it is impossible for them to be rested and fresh if they are "on the job" 24 hours a day. The bottom line is that at some point it will likely be necessary for most individuals to need nursing care. Caregivers should not prevent that from happening because they made a promise that they would never put their love ones in a facility.

If you are in a caregiver relationship and find that you need assistance, please call Oast & Hook to schedule an appointment to meet with one of our attorneys and certified care coordinators. The attorneys at Oast & Hook can also assist clients with their estate planning, financial, insurance, veterans' benefits and special needs planning issues.

Letha Sgritta McDowell is a partner at Oast & Hook, P.C., and she practices in the areas of long-term care planning, estate planning, estate and trust administration, and business planning. Ms. McDowell is licensed to practice law in Virginia and North Carolina.

Ask Allie

O&H: Allie, our area just survived Hurricane Irene, and it appears that several shelters accepted pets. Please give our readers some disaster preparation tips so they can be ready for any future events.

Allie: Sure! There are several things people can do now. First, make sure your pets are current on their vaccinations, and keep good records; shelters may need proof. Keep a collar on hand with identification and rabies vaccination tags; you may also want to microchip your pet. Have a properly sized pet carrier on hand for each animal. The carrier should be large enough for the pet to stand and turn around. Plan your evacuation strategy to include your pet. Specialized pet shelters, animal control shelters, veterinary clinics, as well as friends and relatives are all potential solutions. Local shelters may accept pets, as they did over the weekend, and many hotels are pet-friendly. You will want to do some research ahead of time and make hotel reservations early. Animals brought to a shelter are required to have proper identification collars and rabies tags, identification on all belongings, a leash, ample supply of food, water and food bowls, litter box and litter, medications, and newspapers or plastic bags for clean-up. Bring pets indoors well in advance of a storm; help reassure them and keep them calm. According to the Humane Society of the U.S., rule one is "If it isn't safe for you, it isn't safe for your pets." So if you need to evacuate, do so as soon as possible and bring your pets with you. If you are staying home, designate a "safe room" as a place to put your emergency supplies for your pets and you. I hope we do not have to go through another hurricane or storm any time soon, but I hope these tips help. Now I need to catch up on my sleep . . . See you next week!

Speakers

If you are interested in having an Oast & Hook attorney speak at your event, phone Darcee Hale at 757-967-9702 or e-mail her at hale@oasthook.com. Past topics include estate planning, long-term care planning and veterans benefits.

Distribution of This Newsletter

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