



When You Need Assistance With Healthcare

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Tips For Boomers Helping An Aging Family Member Make Healthcare Decisions

Baby Boomers facing the challenge of helping an aging family member navigate the maze of healthcare decision-making often notice the family member is inclined to make decisions they themselves might not.

This may be frustrating, but there is an upside.

"Today, with so many new technologies and options, it is much easier to make healthcare decisions that are more compatible with our individual values and goals," says Joanna Smith, founder of Healthcare Liaison, which helps people navigate the maze that is today's healthcare system.

"By taking time to understand your family member's history and outlook, you'll have the peace of mind that comes with knowing you've helped them choose a course of care that is both sound and consistent with their values."

Smith offers these ideas for helping aging family members get the care they need in a way that respects their values:

- Be patient. Remember an aging family member will make decisions based on their life experiences — which are frequently quite different from yours.
- If they're overwhelmed, help them break a big decision down into several smaller ones. For example, a decision about trying a new drug becomes "Do you want to try it for a few weeks and then decide if you want to continue?"
- Most elderly people want to "age in place" if possible. If they must move to a new environment, be prepared for some initial confusion and distress — change can be initially quite hard, especially if they are grappling with dementia.
- Your family member may be sent home from the hospital needing all kinds of care. Some health plans partially cover needed home health services, but frequently there is a need for additional help. Have a plan with other family members about how to address this situation.
- All individuals, especially the elderly, who have an actively involved family member, get better care. Your presence and involvement in a family member's care signals to staff and providers that you are concerned and want them well cared for.

Joanna Smith, LCSW, MPH is principal of Healthcare Liaison, a company that assists individuals, families and businesses in navigating the healthcare maze.

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