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LTC Update

ARE YOU LISTENING?

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Remember when your parents were lecturing you on the rules for taking the car for a spin? Dad would put his face in front of yours and say, "Are you listening?" Of course you would say "sure" even though your mind was miles away on the adventure to come.

Today, as adults, the children who received the counsel and wisdom of their parents are facing a reverse situation in their lives. They are finding themselves concerned about their aging parents and what their needs will be as their health and mental abilities fail them. In some cases the children must take the role as parent in securing the safety and well being of an elderly family member.

Julie lives 600 miles from her mother. Knowing her mother's health is frail and she lives alone, Julie calls her every evening after work. The conversation always goes like this:

"How are you doing today Mom, Julie asks?
"Everything's fine", Mother replies.
"Are you taking your pills?"
"Yes, everything's fine."
"Do you need anything?"
"Everything's fine."

Julie does not get much more conversation from her mother. Perhaps everything is fine, or perhaps Julie's mother just wants Julie to think she can take care of herself. Even worse, mother could think all is fine and be forgetting her medication and not eating properly.

Is Julie really listening? **ARE YOU LISTENING?**

It may be time to put your face in front of your parent and listen.

Assuming that all is well and that your elderly family member knows and does what is best for them, may be putting them at risk.

Become a partner with them in their care. The best time to form the partnership is before a crisis happens.

Donna Schempp, a licensed clinical social worker and program director at the Family Caregiver Alliance, states that in talking to your parents, "The sooner, the better." If you bring up the subject before your parents need any extra support, "then it's not crisis driven," she explains. "It's not a way of saying, 'Mom, Dad, there's something wrong with you.'"

A good way to begin is to sit with your parents and ask questions like, what are your concerns for the future. Do you want to remain in your home? Are you worried about losing your independence? Listen to their answers. You might relate your concerns as well, or your desire to be of help.

In becoming a partner in planning for care and helping your loved one, you need to know what legal and financial arrangements are in place. By asking, "What if you had a stroke, Mom, I would need to know where your medical and insurance documents are and what you would have me do on your behalf."

The next step might be to accompany them to their doctors' appointments so to understand what their medical needs are and help create a plan for future needs.

The National Care Planning Council's book "The 4 Steps of Long Term Care Planning" gives the following list of most common services family care givers will provide for their parents.

- Walking, lifting, and bathing
- Using the bathroom and helping with incontinence
- Providing pain management
- Preventing unsafe behavior and preventing wandering
- Providing comfort and assurance or arranging for professional counseling
- Feeding
- Answering the phone
- Making arrangements for therapy, meeting medical needs, and doctors' appointments
- Providing meals
- Maintaining the household
- Shopping and running errands
- Providing transportation
- Administering medications
- Managing money and paying bills
- Doing the laundry
- Attending to personal hygiene and personal grooming
- Writing letters or notes
- Making repairs to the home, maintaining a yard

There are many resources available to help families in caring for their elder parents. As you become involved you will know when it is time to bring in professional services to help or when the need to find new living arrangements is necessary.

Beginning now to talk, listen and plan together, can make the journey more pleasant for everyone involved.

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