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## LTC Update

### **All Too Often Long Term Care Tears Families Apart**

*By Vivian P. Gallo, CLU, CSA, AEP, CLTC\**

Long term care (LTC) has traditionally been the family's responsibility. Long before we had nursing homes or even hospitals, families took care of their own. In the old days, when doctors made house calls, they attended to the immediate needs of the patient, leaving the family to nurse their loved one back to health or through their final days.

In today's modern world, however, everything has changed. Physicians have become specialists and house calls have become a thing of the past. As a result of advancements in pharmaceutical and medical technologies over the past 50 years, people are living well into their 80s, 90s with some even surpassing the 100-year mark.

In one respect, long term care has not changed; it is still a family affair. Today, however, families can manage that care through LTC planning. By thinking ahead, families have the option of selecting from a comprehensive range of professional services that far exceed the very basic nursing home care that was the only care alternative available to families 20 to 30 years ago.

Today's LTC policies offer a "continuum of care" that has been designed to address the ever-changing needs of both patients and their families. In addition to expanded home care benefits, policies may also include adult day care, assisted living facilities -- and even nursing homes when all other options have been exhausted. With well thought out plans in place that cover every eventuality, patients and their families (and not the insurance company) can decide together which mode of care is right for them. With good planning in place, loved ones can even receive professional care at home for extended periods of time.

Long term *care* is the real issue today, not long-term care *insurance*. And at heart it remains a family issue. The question each of us faces is: what would the emotional, physical and financial consequences be to our families and loved ones, if we were to need long term care? How is a major care event likely to affect our spouses, parents, children and grandchildren, partners, families and loved ones? And how will it impact on our retirement and our legacy?

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The issue is not the risk of our needing care, it's the consequences for our family and our retirement portfolio if we ever do. As soon as a life threatening diagnosis is made, families panic because of their desire is to do whatever is needed to provide a safe, caring environment for their loved one. And that care often involves great sacrifice.

It's not uncommon for family members to make career changes in order to provide for the care needs of a loved one. Some even cut back their own work hours in order to meet the care needs of an aging parent, while others pass over advancement opportunities in the face of added responsibilities, or forfeit relocations and promotions. Family members often unwittingly change their lifelong relationships to their loved one from daughter or son, niece or nephew, to "primary caregiver."

Fulfilling caregiving responsibilities can not only create feelings of guilt and resentment for some, but may even require forfeiting lifelong dreams. It's not unusual for one or two family members to carry the bulk of the burden, by providing the majority of care and support needed. Spouses, partners, friends and children - particularly daughters -- provide a significant amount of the informal care needed at home, often until they become so fatigued, depressed and exhausted that their own health suffers. Before long they find themselves unable to function effectively within their own families, or to provide their loved one with the care required.

Inequitable sharing of responsibilities among siblings can place stress on relationships, particularly when one child lives in close proximity to parents or the family member in need of care. A wide variety of circumstances can result in the burden of care not being equally shared. This disparity in what each family member is willing or able to contribute can cause deep rifts between siblings, and much to the family's horror, long term care suddenly becomes the issue that tears families apart.

With proper planning, however, long term care insurance and alternative products can support well-meaning family members and offer them the tools to function as care coordinators and patient advocates instead of caregivers. They can oversee and monitor the needs of their loved ones without running the risk of sacrificing their hard-earned family and professional relationships. Planning ahead provides the means to have trained caregivers do the "heavy lifting" while family members provide the "heavy loving." And it prevents a terrible drain on financial resources if the need for care arises.

There is no doubt that long term care coverage is expensive. But in the final analysis, the question we must all ask ourselves is this: do those costs exceed the emotional, physical and financial consequences our families would suffer if we were to ever need this care?

\* Vivian P. Gallo is a CLU (Chartered Life Underwriter), Certified Senior Advisor (CSA), and Accredited Estate Planner, (AEP) and has Certification in Long-Term Care (CLTC). She is a long term care planner specializing in long term care insurance. She is not a tax consultant or attorney, however, and cannot provide tax or legal advice. Please consult your accountant, tax preparer or attorney on all tax planning and legal matters.

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