

KNOWING IS CARING

CARING FOR YOUR PARENTS: EDUCATION FOR THE FAMILY CAREGIVER®



 Home
Instead
SENIOR CARE®
To us, it's personal.

Many of us have experienced apprehension when it comes to our aging parents. The thought of having the telephone ring late at night can be an unsettling proposition for any adult child. What if Mom fell? What if Dad confuses his medications and complications ensue?

One way to lessen our worries is to make sure we have our seniors' vital information at our fingertips. The more we know, the better prepared we will be to respond quickly in the event of an emergency. Unfortunately, the reality is that many of us have gaps in our knowledge base when it comes to our parents' medical health. The information we do have may not contain enough detail in the event of an emergency.

In this workshop, we will talk about the results from a survey of more than 600 future caregivers that was conducted for the Home Instead Senior Care network. The survey revealed that less than half of the respondents are knowledgeable about their parents' medical history in case of an emergency.

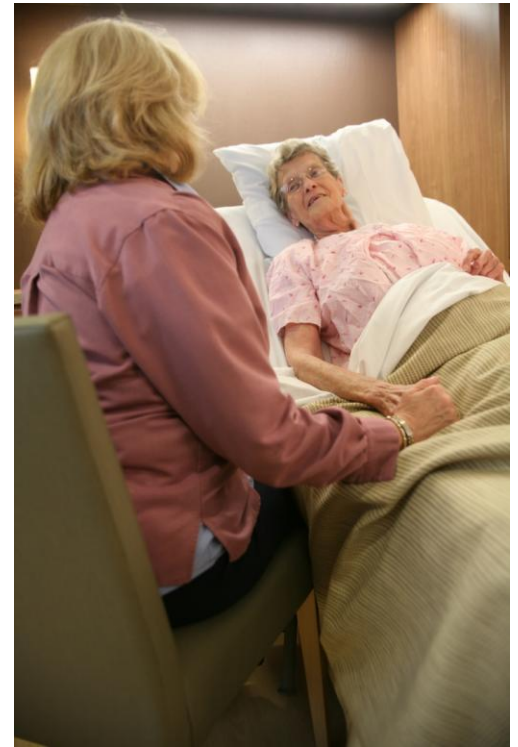
Also, we will discuss managing doctors and medications for seniors, as well as the many medication-related risk factors for older adults. Keeping track of multiple medications or remembering to ask doctors the right questions is not always easy – for any of us. So whether you are a future or current family caregiver, your aging parents will benefit from having you know more about their important health information.

We'll provide tips on the many ways you can help advocate for your senior loved ones, from being an extra set of eyes and ears at appointments to helping them compile a list of questions to ask their doctors or pharmacists. Finally, we will share some checklists and resources to help you become more knowledgeable and better organized – both in the event of an emergency and for ongoing care.

CAREGIVER RESEARCH FINDINGS

Six hundred future family caregivers were surveyed to determine their level of knowledge and awareness when it comes to important information about their senior loved ones.

The respondents were asked how much they know about their parents' medical histories, medication usage, important documents such as wills, financial records and advance medical directives and whether they knew the names and contact information of their service providers, insurers, attorneys, bankers and physicians.



In general, survey participants felt they were informed about their parents' health situation, although the key findings indicate there are many important knowledge gaps:

- Less than half of future caregivers say that they are knowledgeable enough about their parents' **medical history** to be able to provide details in the case of an emergency.
- Three out of ten future caregivers (31%) don't know how many **medications** their parents take and approximately half (49%) are not able to name any of the medications taken by their parents each day.
- Nearly half of future caregivers (48%) say their parents have **allergies** to medications but are not able to name any of those allergies.
- Seven in ten future caregivers (70%) are not able to name their parents' **blood type**.

Understanding the relationship between multiple medical conditions can be challenging for family caregivers and their aging parents:

- Nearly two-thirds of the respondent's surveyed (64%) have parents with **at least two medical or health conditions**, for example, high blood pressure, arthritis, or diabetes.
- More than one-third of the respondents' parents (39%) have seen **four or more different types of medical doctors** in the last year with the most visits made to primary care physicians, internal medicine doctors, and cardiologists.
- Nearly half of their parents (47%) take **three or more prescriptions**, over-the-counter medications and supplements each day. The average number of medications taken each day is 3.4.

Also, many future caregivers do not have all the information they may need in case of a medical crisis:

- Six in ten future caregivers (60%) say they are knowledgeable about their **parents' plans or wishes** in case of an emergency, but fewer than half (47%) say they are knowledgeable about their parents' medical histories in case of an emergency.
- Two in five future caregivers (44%) have never tried to **ask their parents for information** about their medications, names of their doctors, insurance providers, or plans for the future, even though nearly two-thirds (65%) say their parents are willing to talk about this information.

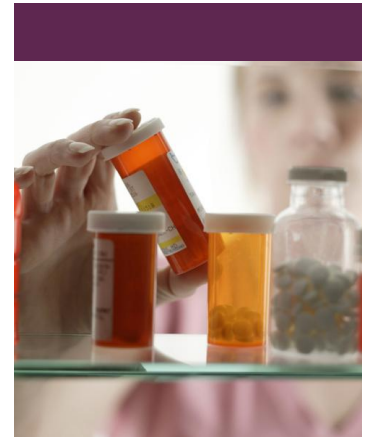
The overall conclusion, whether you are a future or current family caregiver, is that we need to become better informed about our seniors' vital health and life information. The more we know, the more we can help our aging parents when they need it most.

Notes:

DOCTOR AND MEDICATION MANAGEMENT

If you have aging parents who are seeing multiple doctors and receiving multiple medications, they may be at increased risk for medication-related problems. In fact, many seniors have three or more factors that put them at risk for medication-related problems. These factors include:

- Receiving prescriptions from more than one doctor,
- Living alone,
- Vision problems or poor eyesight,
- Taking five or more medications, including non-prescription supplements,
- Being hospitalized in the last twelve months,
- Memory problems,
- Filling prescriptions at more than one pharmacy, and
- Financial issues that make it difficult to fill prescriptions.



In addition here's a startling statistic: seniors represent some 13% of the population, yet they consume 40% of prescription drugs and 35% of all over-the-counter drugs, according to the American Society of Consultant Pharmacists.

One of the most important things to know about safe medication management is that it requires proactive communication between the patient and the doctor. Remind your senior to tell their doctor about all the medicines they are taking. This includes prescription medicines and over-the-counter medicines, such as aspirin, laxatives and vitamin supplements.

There are also many important medication-related questions for seniors to ask their doctors, such as:

- How does this drug interact with other medications I am taking?
- What are the benefits and risks of this medication?
- What are the side effects of the medicine, and what do I do if they occur?
- What food, drink, other medicines and activities should I avoid while taking this medicine?

Family caregivers can help by writing key questions down ahead of time and by trying to ensure that their senior parents have one doctor overseeing all of their medications. If your parent is willing, it's a good idea to have a family member go with them to their doctor appointments to help ensure the doctor's recommendations can be reinforced and followed when they get home.

Pharmacists are another important source for medication information. Most pharmacies have written information sheets on prescription medicines. Pharmacists can answer questions about the medications being prescribed and possible interactions with other drugs. However, they cannot discuss diagnoses.

Family caregivers serve an important function with regard to seniors' doctors and medication management and can help to reduce the risk of medication-related problems for their aging parents.

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CAREGIVER INFORMATION MANAGEMENT: TOOLS AND RESOURCES

As a family caregiver, there are many things you can do to assist with your seniors' daily routines, and prepare for the unexpected emergency.

Start by identifying the information and documents that you need to know about, especially in the event an aging parent experiences a medical emergency.

- Will and testament,
- Power of attorney,
- Health care proxy,
- Financial information, including bank location and account numbers,
- Safe deposit box key,
- Medicare/Medicaid cards, and
- Social security number.

Once you have determined if these documents/[items](#) exist and where they are located, be sure to make copies and provide another family member with a list and where they are located.

Next, compile a comprehensive contact list of the names, addresses and telephone numbers of your parent's key providers such as:

- Health insurance agent/provider,
- Long-term care insurance agent/provider,
- Primary care physician,
- Attorney, and
- Accountant or financial advisor

You will need to ask your parents to work with you in compiling this information and locating and copying documents. Be sure to let them know that this information will be used in a medical emergency as well as allowing you to help them manage their medications, doctors and appointments. According to a survey conducted for the Home Instead Senior Care network, many parents are willing to talk about as well as provide their important information.

There are many online resources where you can learn more about medication management. Here are a few helpful websites:

The American Society of Consultant Pharmacists is an organization of 1,500 North American consultant and senior care pharmacists who are specialists in geriatrics, geriatric pharmacology, and the unique medication-related needs of the geriatric population.	www.ascp.com
The Commission for Certification in Geriatric Pharmacy website provides information about geriatric certified pharmacists.	www.ccgp.org
The Center for Improving Medication Management & the National Council on Patient Information and Education provides information about the safe use of prescription and over-the-counter medications.	www.learnaboutrxsafety.org

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