

Supporting an Ageing Family Member

One of the great post war success stories in the UK has been the huge improvement in healthcare. Life expectancy continues to increase and many previously terminal illnesses are now curable or at least their symptoms are manageable often for long periods. Many folk can now expect to enjoy a long and active retirement. Despite that we can't quite beat ageing and eventually many of us will suffer diminishing capabilities as we grow older – leading in some cases to legal incapacity.

Actually there is a raft of support available to adults as their capacities diminish – but all too often families are not aware of their entitlements. The following is a brief description of some support which is available.

Each local authority has a duty under the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 to assess the needs of any person who might require community care services. After assessment depending on the needs of the individual, help may be provided in various areas such as day care, respite care, provision of equipment, alteration of property to assist with disability, meals on wheels, residential care or nursing care. Some help may be free of charge some may have to be paid for depending on means.

Less well known is the fact that where someone provides a substantial level of care for another – for example a wife caring for a husband with physical disabilities or perhaps suffering from dementia – then that carer is also entitled to a separate assessment of his or her needs. This is an entitlement again under the Social Work (Scotland) Act – and carers after assessment can access what services might be appropriate. “Suffering in silence” and struggling to cope should not be the fate of any carer in this day and age – at least that is the intention of the legislation.

Disabled older people may also be entitled to further help with home adaptation, transport, meals and communications equipment by virtue of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Person's Act 1970.

Free personal and nursing care is available to everyone over 65 in Scotland where there is an assessed need. This is fairly well known but perhaps less well known is that under the Social Care (Self Directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013 individuals can take control of their own budgetary entitlements here. Basically the idea is the individual receives a payment from the council but can buy their own care from providers other than the local authority. It is thought this might produce more flexible arrangements more suitable to individuals.

A right for many older people – provided they have developed a mental disorder – such as dementia for example - is to access advocacy services. In simple terms the advocate will speak on behalf of the individual in formal situations. An advocate appointed on behalf of someone is intended to offer support and representation to enable the individual to have as much control and influence as possible on the care and welfare decisions being made about them.

Where an older person has difficulty managing or understanding welfare payments that individual would be entitled to help from a welfare rights officer. If appropriate

the Department of Work and Pensions can appoint someone – usually an appropriate friend or relative – to manage the person's benefits for them. That friend or relative is then known as a DWP "Appointee".

The services mentioned here are just snapshots of some which are available from official bodies. Not mentioned at all is all the help available from the many charitable organisations active with older people.

So when someone in your family perhaps starts to decline – remember there is lots of help out there – it's just a case of going out and finding it. What not to do is to struggle on caring for a loved one thinking family members must cope on their own. There are no prizes for that approach.

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