

Long-Term Care: Don't Scare Them, Prepare Them

My mother died quickly and painfully from cancer in 1986, leaving my father and five adult children. Our family doctor had always told me that hell for my father would be loss of control, and that's exactly what happened over a period of seven years. Dad suffered from vascular dementia -- a cognitive impairment caused by the disruption of blood flow to the brain as the result of a series of strokes; he also had probable Alzheimer's disease, a condition now called mixed dementia. He endured incontinence, and hearing and sight problems.

To top it all off, he also suffered from a severe form of spinal arthritis, which put him in a wheelchair for the last years of his life. But somehow he lived until he was almost 94 -- I believe to teach his daughter everything he could about what it's like to grow old, to suffer, but to leave this earth with grace and dignity. It is because of my long dementia care experience that I now speak, write, research, and educate about the vital need for long-term care planning. I had 14 long years to see what happens as we age, and what happens if we do not prepare.

Be Your First Client

Before you can walk in your clients' shoes, you need to put them on! Buy the products you plan to sell, so you can:

- Learn how to complete the application completely and correctly
- Experience the underwriting process
- Have a policy you can show to your clients to indicate your belief in the product.

Be ready and able to explain to clients how your insurance fits into your long-term care plan, and how this care plan then fits into your own retirement plan.

Lead By Example

Examine and learn from your own personal care situation. If you have aging parents or relatives, talk to them about their situation. Ask the questions you will be asking your clients, so you become comfortable with the process, and see how this interaction can become the foundation of a care plan.

The questions may include:

- What do you worry about, as you grow older?
- Where do you want to live out your senior years?
- How can I help you remain independent?
- Where are the important documents -- will, powers of attorney?
- If something happens to you, have you told me everything I need to know so I can do what you want me to do?

Research the Health Care System Where You Live

Too many of us wait until a crisis occurs before we take the time to learn how our health care system works -- and then it can be too late. So take the time now to investigate your care system, what is and is not covered by the public system, the difference between acute and long-term care, and what seniors face as they age and move into the continuum of care.

Research care costs - from home care to retirement to long-term facility care. Since the majority of people want to age at home, make your clients aware that full-time home care 24 hours a day, seven days a week can cost up to \$500 a day or \$15,000 a month in North America.

A basic knowledge of care terms and definitions is also essential -- including respite care, adult day care, hospice care -- so you can discuss the role these services play in care planning, and explain policy terms correctly.

Target Your Market

Who is your prospect for long-term care insurance (LTCI)?

- The woman who is actively caring for parents part- or full-time
- A 50- to 65-year-old man with a parent in a nursing home
- Those who do not wish to burden their families by requiring long- term care
- Those who have no family available to provide care
- Those who wish to leave a financial legacy to family or community.

Those who are caregivers for aging parents deal with long-term care every day; they see and feel the pain and want to ensure that their own families avoid this pain. They are also old enough to understand the concept of insurability, because they themselves are probably struggling with early signs of arthritis or high blood pressure.

Know Your Clients

How do you find the vulnerable boomers, the caregivers, and the women who want to plan ahead? There is one simple solution: Know your clients. Since boomers are born optimists who do not respond to scare tactics or statistics, you need to do some work to get to know them as individuals, to learn what their hot buttons are, what their fears are. Your client base will probably have families in which seniors are looking after seniors -- where a 65-year-old adult child is caring for a 90-year-old parent -- so the health of two people may be at risk and need funding and support.

Don't be afraid to ask your clients lots of questions:

- How do you see yourself aging?
- Do you know how much care costs?
- Do you know what the government will/will not pay for?
- Have you told your family what you want if something happens to you?
- Have you made plans for your family in the event something critical or terminal happens to you?

Look for clues to your client's future; how old are her parents? Is there any Alzheimer's disease in the family? Has she ever been a caregiver? Does he have friends and/or family who would care for him if needed? And what if there are no children, or a client is single? In these cases, it is important that your clients put a care planning team in place -- a care manager, friends, or neighbors -- so they know whom they can call upon when they need help, or need someone to advocate on their behalf.

Timing can be everything. Too many advisors put off the care conversation until the need is staring them in the face, that is, a health care crisis has occurred in a client family -- be it to a child, spouse, parent, or the client himself. The key here is setting the stage. The minute you secure a new client, regardless of age, introduce the concept of long-term care planning and related health products. Then, when the time comes to approach the subject, your client will be expecting it. Help clients realize that long-term care planning closes the circle of protection in the retirement discussion.

When you develop a deep relationship with your clients, one based on more than money, and you are a long-term care planning resource for them, your clients will turn to you first when they need help, and will refer others because of your business practice and process.

They will refer others because you care.