

Caring for Your Loved One
Article #2

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Dear Geriatric Care Manager,

As a granddaughter of someone with Alzheimer's disease, I am experiencing first-hand some of the struggles of caregiving. My grandparents were always pretty independent and able to manage things on their own. However, my grandfather recently had a heart attack and passed away. This left my family to not only grieve his loss, but to also pick up where he left off in caring for my grandmother who has late stage Alzheimer's disease. My Dad has three brothers and they are all married. Having such a large family left us with a dilemma: Everyone has their own opinion about how we should take care of Grandmother. We are at a standstill about who gets to make the decisions, who will become her caregiver, where will she live. Suddenly, we are faced with all of these questions that none of us are prepared to answer. Help!

Signed,

A Loving Granddaughter

Dear Loving Granddaughter,

Concern for your Grandmother in this stage of her life is natural. Be patient with your family; they may not be as comfortable asking for help as you are. A large family might face communication challenges. Here are some suggestions that may help. Hold a meeting or a conference call so that everyone is able to voice their opinions and concerns, and feel as if they are involved and being heard. This would be a good time for the family members to assign the caregiving tasks so that all of the work of caregiving is not assumed by only the local family members. Tasks can be divided according to the skill level, availability, and level of comfort of each family member. For example, if someone does not live locally and would be unable to drive your grandmother to her doctors' visits they might be able to help with bill paying or financial matters. You might also consider sending group emails. This helps get any news or updates out to multiple caregivers at the same time. Communication is the key during this time, especially when the larger decisions such as about housing are made. Obtain the advice and assistance of a geriatric care manager or even have one facilitate your family meetings. Utilize community resources that provide information such as your local area agency on aging. These resources can provide you with expert advice about housing options and other services available to older adults with dementia. Caregiver support groups can be helpful as well. Another important consideration is respite for the caregivers who may be most involved in your grandmother's care. Family members can take turns relieving one another to give the primary caregiver periods of rest. Good luck and kudos to you for taking the lead in considering how to proceed with your Grandmother's care.