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## Experts Who Navigate Aging Challenges

Where do family members start when they get the call that Mom had a stroke or Dad had another fall? What about the spouse caring for someone with a dementia? Do they have a plan if something happens to them while caregiving?

About 80% of you would have said you would look on the internet. What words would you have used to find someone to give you guidance, and do you know how to vet him or her to see if they are really what your family member or you need at this time in the aging journey? The other 20% would have asked friends or maybe a medical provider.

You might not even know what these experts are called. I answer a call at least once a week from someone who just does not know where to begin this journey and what they should do first. If Mom had a stroke, you are immersed in the medical system, and you might get a discharge planner that can help you see the long road and not just the immediate need. If Dad is having accidents and has a memory issue, you might need to start with legal tools before you get a diagnosis. It all depends on many facets of the situation.

## Aging Life Care Experts

The expert you need is called either an “Aging Life Care Expert” or a “Professional Geriatric Care Manager.” The majority of these professionals have backgrounds in social work, nursing, counseling, psychology, gerontology, or a related discipline. You would want an “Advanced Level” professional who belongs to the [Aging Life Care Association](#) (ALCA). You can search the ALCA website by [zip code](#) to find someone in your area.

I suggest asking the professionals you find if they have been in business as a geriatric care manager for over 5 years and for details about their professional education and licensure. You could even ask for some references. However, those who are advanced level members are certified and many are licensed in their field. They also follow a standard of practice and a code of ethics.



They will listen to your story and tell you if they are the right person for you or if it is better to start with an [elder law attorney](#) or even Adult Protective Services. Just this week when someone was asking about a parent who was being discharged from Skilled Nursing Medicare coverage, I had to refer her to the ombudsman services because her mother didn't have the financial resources to pay for the 24/7 care. In her state, Medicaid would take over the cost of the skilled nursing care, and she didn't need to quit her job to take care of her mom. The ombudsman would help her with that transition in the current setting. So, an expert can really make a big difference in decisions that impact everyone's life.

With couples where one has a progressive illness, I help them with something I call a “road map,” giving them options for most of the “what if’s” of a longer life. The map allows them to breathe again, for often this worry is always on their mind. Once they know they have a plan and a professional to guide them, they can get back to enjoying life. My fellow colleagues all over the country can help with plans of this sort, as well as plans that need more boots on the ground strategies.

## Taking the Proactive First Step



May is “National Aging Life Care” month. I encourage all of you to search the ALCA website and learn more about how to find someone. On the website you can find a [list of questions](#) to ask someone when you are looking for this type of direction. The cost of hiring an expert to guide you is about the same as an hourly cost of a mental health counselor in your area of the country. Just paying for one hour could save you hours of time, give you options, and provide a lifeline so both you and your family member have the best quality of life possible.

**Affirmation: “I have done some proactive research  
for my family member’s aging journey.”**

### Resources:

[Aging Life Care Association](#)