



Navigating the Eldercare System

Dear Friends,

Having worked the Florida elder care system for the past 25 years, I recently conducted a self-test of the system. The disastrous results of that action prompted me to write this article, which I shall send to the authorities. I believe we have responsibility. We all should be more concerned with what potential users of Florida's elder care services are actually being told, the problems they are encountering and the fact that, in my opinion, less than qualified people are trying to help some of the frailest elders in our state.

On February 3, 2015, I called the Department of Elder Affairs in Tallahassee to inquire about the Statewide Medicaid Managed Care program, which consists of the Managed Medical Assistance Program and the Long-Term Care Program. My call to Tallahassee resulted in a transfer to a state office in Orlando. I talked to a person, was transferred to another office, and my name and phone number were requested. The next day, having not heard back from my call, I again called the Orlando number.

After several minutes I was connected to a counselor at Senior Resource Alliance and so started a most frustrating conversation. It was only because I knew what to ask that I finally got some answers-none of which I liked. However, since I was a frustrated



senior inquiring about services supposedly provided my state, I knew that my frustrations needed conquering if I was to learn anything that might help others. This is what I learned:

Information about elder services is there if you know where to look. I informed the counselor that the difficulty was in knowing where to look for help.

The counselors are not well informed about what the state offers.

Education and connection to resources are sadly lacking, as is a compassionate attitude toward seniors trying to navigate the system.

I then called the community provider number given to me by the counselor and was asked to leave my name and phone number, which I did. This is supposedly a source to help with Medicaid benefits. The other question I had about daycare required that I call the Senior Resource Alliance number again at a later date. When I asked about availability of information, the counselor mentioned Aging Matters, Joe's Club (which I started), and other local resources, but nothing about how to contact them.

All this reflects on the absolute need for seniors to be better informed and willing to fight for what matters to them. We must do a better job of lobbying our elected leaders for a county aging plan and localization of resource information so that we can minimize the frustration and stress of seniors who cannot navigate the system. Effective senior advocacy can achieve a county government that will listen to perceived wrongs and take senior rights seriously. After all, we do live in a rather aging county. In fact, it is the 24th oldest of 3,067 counties in the United States. Join us at Helping Seniors and become part of the senior advocacy effort. Call Kay at: 321-473-7770 or email her at: Kay@helpingseniorsofbrevard.org.



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Joe Steckler is the President of Helping Seniors of Brevard, a non-profit organization designed to advocate, educate, and fundraise on behalf of Brevard's senior citizens. Feel free to contact us at: info@helpingseniorsofbrevard.org or calling: 321-473-7770 ~www.helpingseniorsofbrevard.org

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