

Elder Law Guys: Some things you should tell your kids (even though you may not want to)

June 25, 2018 9:15 AM

We are frequently surprised by what many of our clients keep secret from their loved ones, things that often are highly important for those loved ones in assisting a parent as they go through the aging process (we admit that we occasionally get caught up in that same secrecy within our own families).

As a result, many families and friends are caught unaware when a crisis develops.

We're including friends in this discussion as it's been estimated that as many as one third of over 75 million people who are between 52 and 70 are without children. And some people don't fully trust their children, for whatever reason, including their spouses.

Who are your medical providers? Do you keep a list that someone can readily access in the event of an emergency? Do you keep a medical history that would assist that provider and your loved one in providing a comprehensive background for your care (the one-size fits all electronic medical record certainly has not been perfected, especially among competing medical institutions).

Do you have a record of your prescription medications and supplements, including dosages and frequency of use? Definitely keep it updated. Does your loved one have a list of emergency contacts; people and or organizations to contact if needed?

Digital and hard copy records — does a loved one/friend have access to these records? Some examples would be Medicare and health insurance cards; birth certificate; copy of death certificate of spouse, if applicable; and driver's license. What about computer passwords? Most of us have an insane number of these.

Where are your estate planning documents (will, trust, power of attorney, health care directive/living will)?

Does your friend know that they exist and where to locate them? Does a loved one know who will act on your behalf if you can't do it for yourself? Have you made the mistake of naming them in that role and not telling them you've done so? Do you even know if they would be willing to take on that responsibility?

Do you work with financial and legal professionals? If so, does the friend know how to contact them? Are you willing to let your loved one know what you have and how it's owned (in your name alone; jointly with others)?

Life insurance: do you have it and where are the policies and who are the beneficiaries? This financial information is often the most sensitive area for discussion. Even though you may not be willing to discuss these financial matters in exquisite detail, at least pointing your loved one to the person or organization that has this information could be crucial.

Have you made funeral arrangements? Have you expressed your preferences to your children; burial, cremation, memorial service vs. three-day wake. Do you have a file with this information including cemetery plot and even a pre-paid funeral plan?

Let's also assume you may no longer be able to age at home. What provisions, if any, have you made?

This would include making the home more user friendly and exploring other housing options such as an apartment, condominium, assisted living facility, home care, etc.? Have you discussed your preferences with your loved one? Have you thought about whether you would move in with one of your children or whether they would even want you living with them?

Remember the old saying in planning matters of this nature: "Better a year too early than a year too late."

As an aside, one of us recently downsized from a house he had lived in for 25 years into an apartment.

The experience became so nerve wracking because of the ineptitude of a number of parties involved that we're looking into writing a column along the nature of "The downsides to downsizing" and would welcome comments from readers who have gone through the process.

Julian Gray and Frank Petrich are certified elder law attorneys who practice in the Pittsburgh area at Gray Elder Law. Send questions to elderlawguys@grayelderlaw.com or visit www.grayelderlaw.com.