



## **Family Caregiver Holiday Planning – Senior Care Corner Show Transcript**

**Barry:** Welcome to Senior Care Corner Show. I'm Barry.

**Kathy:** And I'm Kathy. Thanks for joining us!

**Barry:** You'll find us online at SeniorCareCorner.com with solutions, tools and information for families and other caregivers of senior adults.

Well we're getting close to the holiday season already it seems. And in light of that for our feature segment today we want to talk about some considerations for family caregivers of seniors as you're looking ahead to the holidays. But before we get there Kathy, I believe you have some news items for us?

**Kathy:** I do Barry. I brought together some very interesting different topics for everyone today. Our first news item:

### **Many Americans Worry about Cost of Long-Term Care**

You and your senior are not alone if you worry about the cost of long term care.

A new poll by the Harris Interactive Health Day which interviewed over 2100 adults finds that more than two thirds of Americans are anxious and uncertain about how they will meet the cost of nursing or home care if they need it as they age.

People also worry about how these healthcare costs are covered under the current insurance system. 49% thought the bulk of the bill was paid by individuals; one third thought Medicare covered the cost. Only 19% understood that the major funder of this healthcare is actually Medicaid.

Most agree however that as America ages, how to pay for the health care needed for seniors will only get worse. 87% called the situation serious or somewhat serious when polled.

Currently 12 million people need some type of long term care and that number is expected to double in 20 years.

The Affordable Care Act does not address how to pay rising healthcare costs for the aging population.

Most are unaware that Medicaid only begins paying once the senior's assets have been spent down in order to qualify for coverage. 64% of those polled thought buying long term care insurance was needed but only 8% have done so.

Researchers state very few Americans can save enough money to pay for care and will require some government support.

Barry, as we've covered in a recent post, the Long Term Care Commission recently issued their recommendations on how the current delivery of healthcare system can be improved. We'll have to keep an eye on any new developments in that story.

**Barry:** And I bet too Kathy, that family members of seniors share a lot of the same concerns and the uncertainty that their senior loved ones do so I think maybe providing more information along those lines might be helpful for us!

**Kathy:** It's a hot topic! Our next news item:

### **Healthy Eating Benefits Heart Failure Patients, a Study Says**

Healthy eating habits can significantly reduce high blood pressure and improve heart function in heart failure patients according to a new study. Heart failure occurs when the heart can't pump enough blood to meet the body's needs.

The participants in this study were 60-70 year olds and ate only meals that were prepared for them in the Research Lab kitchen. The meals were picked up and re-heated at home.

The meals provided followed the nutritional guidelines of the DASH eating program which is high in potassium, calcium and antioxidants as well as low sodium. This is the plan recommended by the American Heart Association to control blood pressure. The sodium content of this particular diet is 1,150 mg per day. The typical sodium intake for men is 4,200 mg and women is 3,300 mg.

After following the diet for three weeks, the participants had a drop in blood pressure similar to the effect of taking blood pressure medication.

The study validates that following a DASH diet can lower blood pressure and reduce the potential side effects of heart failure.

Barry, one of the things that we know about that we're trying to address in healthcare is the re-hospitalization of seniors and one of the biggest diagnoses for that is heart failure.

**Barry:** That's very interesting Kathy. And as you keep telling us, diet can really make a difference.

**Kathy:** Right, if you understand that these people cut their sodium intake by half and showed a great improvement in their blood pressure. Our next news item:

### **The US FDA Issues a Final Rule On Mobile Medical Apps**

The US Food and Drug Administration just issued their final rules governing the development of mobile medical apps. They say they will oversee these products if they have the potential for harm if they fail to function properly.

The new rule arrives two years after the draft guidelines were proposed.

The FDA will regulate only those apps that transform smartphones into devices that it currently regulates such as ECG machines that determine if a person is having a heart attack. They will also regulate apps that are used as accessories to a regulated device used to diagnose patients.

It does not intend to regulate general consumer apps or wellness apps such as pedometers or heart rate monitors.

The particular apps they will target will be dependent on their function and risks. If a device is regulated in the hospital, it will be regulated as a mobile app.

They'll have to be cleared by the FDA prior to going to market. They have already cleared about 100 mobile medical devices in the past decade, 40 of which were cleared in just the past two years.

Those apps that track health information, promote strategies for weight loss or medication dosage are not considered harmful and will not be reviewed.

Barry, amazingly there are about 97,000 mobile health applications in the App Store today.

**Barry:** That's right Kathy. That's a good follow up to an earlier post that we did on that story. In fact, looking out at what the FDA has, they have some specific consumer information so; it's probably worth doing a follow up blog post as well.

**Kathy:** it's an interesting topic. Our final news item today:

### **Three Tips for Healthy Aging from the 2013 National Senior Games Silver Medalists**

What's the secret to making it to age 80 and remaining active, healthy and happy?

Members of the 2013 National Senior Games basketball team, the New Mexico Cruisin' Big Dogs, will tell you. They have been playing competitive basketball for the past 15 years and offer these tips for maintaining a healthy lifestyle as we age.

1. Be Active. One player says keep walking; if that's all you can do, walk as much as you can.

Another player suggests that you can find a sport or other hobby you love and take part in it with your friends. As long as you are moving and staying active it doesn't matter what you are doing, find what you love and stick to it!

2. Eat Well. They say a good diet and exercise is important and you need to get your rest. Proper nutrition is essential for people of all ages but especially as you get older and your body becomes susceptible to serious health problems. Eat a well-rounded diet full of protein, fiber, calcium and other important nutrients stress the team to give your body the fuel it needs to stay strong.
3. Love. Stay connected with friends, volunteer, work and serve to prevent being alone. The emotional aspect of health is a key part of overall health.

The goal of the team's tips is to bring together all the components of healthy living. Staying active, connected and healthy will allow us to do whatever we want maybe even be in the silver medalists in the Senior Games like this team of 80 year olds did!

**Barry:** Well you can't beat advice on successful aging from those who are doing it.

**Kathy:** That's right!

**Barry:** Thanks Kathy, those are some great news items! We'll go ahead now and move into our feature segment for this episode.

### SCC Show Family Caregiver Holiday Planning

As we're recording this another holiday season is rapidly approaching then again much of our discussion here will be applicable to any time of the year for many family caregivers, especially those who live at a distance from their senior loved ones.

Today we're talking to the loved ones of seniors who will be visiting them over the holiday season, either in small numbers or for large family get-togethers, as well as those who are starting to contemplate the gifts they will get for senior family members this year.

**Kathy:** Barry, it's not even Halloween yet as we record this. Isn't that a bit early to get everyone thinking about the holidays?

**Barry:** Well, I know you're being facetious Kathy, I can see that you've been thinking about holiday gatherings and gifts for some time now, as have many family caregivers. Not only do many of the details take planning ahead just to make things work, especially for those traveling from some distance away, but really everyone wants to make the season a nice one for the family.

When it comes to planning for gift giving, I know there are many different paths people take, all the way from starting their planning after the previous holiday season to waiting right up to the last minute. If you're like us, you can start thinking early in the year and still be stumped about what to get when the time comes. Well, I should say that was mostly in the past. All of the research we do on technology for seniors now gives us what sometimes feels like too many ideas.

**Kathy:** And yet we still have a hard time deciding what to give them.

**Barry:** Yes, but too many options is a MUCH better problem than too few. Now it's a matter of prioritizing, deciding which is most likely to be of value to them and maybe a few other considerations. And that's a function not only of the tech devices we're considering but also which our senior loved ones will adopt most readily.

Tell you what...let's come back to that later. Before we get to the fun part of the holidays we should talk about the aspect that may be more meaningful to the family but probably not nearly as much fun to plan and organize.

**Kathy:** You mean those discussions the family should have when gathered together, right Barry?

**Barry:** You've got it, Kathy

## Holiday Family Meetings

For many the holiday season does mean family gatherings, often bringing together more of the family than can be found in one place at any other time of the year. We'll leave it to your own opinion whether that's what makes the holidays great though.

Holidays are meant to be festive but there is so much that should be done with the family together that some time should be set aside in planning for some family meeting time.

**Kathy:** You're saying plan for family meeting time, Barry?

**Barry:** Yes, I am for a couple of reasons. Holiday time is hectic around many homes and even more so when the family is gathered. Planning some time for a meeting makes it harder for other activities to get in the way and it lets everyone know that the meeting's important. Planning also gives family members time to consider the topics to be discussed, which should make the discussion both more meaningful and hopefully more decisive.

**Kathy:** Of course, telling everyone what's to be discussed might result in some resistance to the meeting in the first place.

**Barry:** Well that's always a risk, Kathy, but these meetings are simply too important. Besides, if someone doesn't want to discuss the topics on the agenda for the meeting they may well just walk away or at best refuse to participate meaningfully in the discussion.

**Kathy:** That's true. I guess learning about the resistance up front allows you to talk things through and maybe get everyone on board with the need for the meeting before you're gathered. That could make for a happier family holiday altogether.

**Barry:** Great point there, Kathy.

Now that we've talked about scheduling the meeting, I guess we better talk about the potential topics for your family meeting.

## Family Meeting Topics

We talk and write often about decisions families should make, hopefully together, and things that all family members – or at least the adults in the family – should know before the information is needed. Those are some of the topics to consider for your family meeting if they haven't been covered already and include such things as:

- The care of senior loved ones who are nearing a time – if they're not there already – when they can no longer be safe and healthy being totally independent at home. What will they do when that time comes? Will they use paid caregivers in their home, live with a family member or maybe move into an assisted living facility or nursing home? These changes take advance planning and even mindset changes, both for the seniors and family members, so the earlier they're discussed the better it is for all.

- Another potential topic is the condition of the home where senior loved ones are living – whether it is adequate to support aging adults, who physically and maybe even mentally have different needs and capabilities than they did when they were younger.
- You might also need to discuss end of life decisions for the senior members of the family, then again maybe for everyone. Do they know whether they want extraordinary measures or care keeping them alive? If so, have those decisions been documented so they're known to all and legally enforceable when needed?

Have I missed anything we should cover, Kathy?

**Kathy:** Well Barry, you've covered most of the major topics. I think we should include addressing the needs of family caregivers – those members of the family who are putting time, attention and maybe their own money into providing care for senior loved ones in their own homes. Often those family members have needs that are overlooked because of the focus on the older family member.

**Barry:** Great addition Kathy. We often talk about the need to care for the caregiver so getting family members to talk about that is really important too.

We're not going to dig into those topics here, but I will provide some links to posts or earlier Senior Care Corner Show episodes where those topics themselves are the focus to help you in planning and preparing for the meeting.

The topics for your meeting should, of course, be those that are right for your family. You also have to decide how much to try and tackle for one meeting. If there are multiple topics that seem urgent to everyone then maybe they all need to be addressed. If that's not case though, you might want to start with one topic, especially if you haven't addressed issues like these as a family before.

**Kathy:** Good point let everyone get comfortable with the idea of talking about these subjects together.

**Barry:** Or if not comfortable – which none of you may ever be with these topics – at least overcome some resistance to the idea by seeing how much it can mean to talk about it together.

### **The Family Meeting**

Scheduling the family meeting, as hard as that may be during the busy holiday gathering, may also be the easy part of the process. I don't say that to scare anyone off but to prepare you for what might be difficult conversations when you do get together.

You might find it makes the meeting go better if there are preparations up front. Doing some research about the topics and gathering information about your senior loved one's needs can really help focus the discussion on what's valuable. Providing what you can to others up front can help them give the topics some thought, too.

**Kathy:** Be careful, though, not to be seen as deciding things ahead of time and forcing that on others. Even if you have made your own decision, you will likely find it harder to get others to share their thoughts – or even attend the meeting – if they feel the decisions have been made and their input has no value.

**Barry:** Great suggestion, Kathy. No sense in making a difficult discussion even more so by turning off others in the family right up front.

When it comes to the meeting, here are some suggestions that might make it run more smoothly and help the family reach consensus. It's better that everyone be in the same place about what's best or at least understand, and hopefully respect, the opinions of others.

- First and foremost, the meeting should center on the senior loved ones whose interests are being discussed. After all, these are largely their decisions as long as they are capable of making those decisions. Don't let them feel like a bystander with others deciding their lives for them.

**Kathy:** Not only should they not feel like one, but they should not BE a bystander in these discussions. It IS their life. They may not want what's best for them, which is something the family may have to address at some point, but they should understand the concerns of the family – and the family should listen to and understand theirs.

**Barry:** Great point once again, Kathy.

- Also make sure every participant in the meeting weighs in on each part of the discussion. You don't know if someone nodding on the periphery of the meeting is in agreement or just holding back disagreement or a point of view that maybe will meaningfully add to the meeting.
- Set up a plan for next steps after the meeting, even if those next steps will wait until after the holidays or if the next step is simply another meeting. There should be understanding by all on what will be done as a result of the meeting and each should leave with a clear understanding of their role in what comes next.
- Stay in communication with members of the family after the meeting so everyone knows what's happening and understands what is encountered along with way. Those communications can be via a conference call, email or even social media messaging.

**Kathy:** Barry, I would hesitate to use social media messaging, though, unless there is comfort by everyone in doing so and sufficient knowledge of the social tools and process to ensure that everything is private and not inadvertently posted to the public.

**Barry:** Good thought there, Kathy. Those of us who use social networking sites daily may take for granted some steps that others have not learned. Then too, some of the sites keep making changes such that even we have trouble keeping up at times.

## Holiday Gift Giving Ideas

Now that covers what we wanted to say at least for today about family meetings during the holiday season. Again, you might want to check out the show notes for links to go more in-depth into the meeting topics themselves as you prepare.

Time to get back to the lighter side of the holidays and holiday planning: the selection and giving of gifts.

There is SO much in the way of technology for seniors we can't possibly cover it all but really want to get you thinking about it.

**Kathy:** Barry, we were pleased to see so much on display and hands-on demonstrations and even training for seniors at the AARP Life at 50 plus event. It really brought it home to many people and hopefully will help overcome some of the sentiment that it just isn't for them.

**Barry:** And maybe it will get some seniors talking about it with family members and help THEM overcome the "it isn't for my senior loved one" thinking that may be just as big a barrier for many.

We've cut down the list of items to touch on for today's discussion to keep it more manageable and even actionable as a holiday gift this year. We – well at least I – would love to discuss some of the home automation-type products that really do a lot to help seniors live independently in their homes longer than they could before. Many of those are bigger projects or take a longer lead time to review and plan adequately to make sure we're getting the right thing for the homes of our aging in place loved ones.

Even more important, though, I think we're on the verge of some big advances in the way those devices work – and work together – that will provide even better options for seniors and family caregivers in the future. Just as important, I think many of the prices will come down and make the purchases even more manageable whether they're being made by the seniors themselves or family members on their behalf.

It's tempting with technology to put off the decision waiting for the next version, which will be better, easier to use and lower in price, only to find that we can keep putting it off and putting it off with new versions coming out all the time.

**Kathy:** You mean like we see with the smartphone and tablets?

**Barry:** Exactly, Kathy. We could lose so much benefit associated with those if we keep waiting for the next one instead of just taking advantage of what the current version offers.

I think it's different for Home Tech devices, though. Yes there are some good ones out there now and seniors could get some benefits today, but I think the changes we'll see over the next year will be so significant it's worth waiting.

We'll learn more about that in January at CES 2014 and yes we're going to report back, as we always do. Based on some hints I'm seeing in the lead up to the event, though, my hopes are high there will be much to report.

**Kathy:** Okay, so what should family members be considering for senior loved ones this holiday season?

**Barry:** I see a number of items, both in the technology and low tech areas. First, though, family members should consider if the seniors in their lives have specific needs. Is there a medical device the doctor has recommended that is simply out of reach financially? That may be a good place for a family member –

**Kathy:** or maybe multiple family members pitching in together –

**Barry:** to work to get something that's of real meaning to their senior loved one.

### Tech Gifts for Seniors

On the tech side, Kathy, I would start with the smartphones and tablets you mentioned a minute ago. We hear wherever we go about how much seniors love the tablet computers they have. At the same time, a recent report from the Pew Research Center reflects that only 18% of seniors currently have tablets so there's a lot of room out there for those where it might be a good idea. The same report also says that, even though three fourths of seniors have cell phones only 18% of them have smartphones. With smartphones today being essentially smaller tablets that let you make calls – and in some cases not all THAT much smaller than tablets, those might fill a need for your senior loved ones.

**Kathy:** But how do we decide which to get?

**Barry:** Ahh another great question. It's easy to get bogged down in making a decision on the right one and end up doing nothing. It's also easy to get a senior loved one the same device we're using because we love it and feel it will be right for them too and then find out later it isn't. These are some things you might want to consider.

- What size phone and/or table do they need or can they use? Something too small might not be useful for someone with a vision problem or dexterity limitations in their fingers yet too big a device might be too difficult for some to hold in their hands.
- Which system has the apps they may want to use? Many apps are written for one set of devices, such as Apple, Android or Windows, but not for the others. If your senior would want to use an app recommended by a friend or healthcare provider and it isn't on the device they you give them it may lead to lower interest in using that device.
- Another consideration is the systems YOU or other family members use and know? When it comes to using the devices and especially if something goes wrong or doesn't work as expected, many seniors will call a family member – often the one who gave them the device. If you can't help them make it useful they might just decide not to use it.

**Kathy:** Barry let's not forget e-readers. I've heard many seniors who found those were a good entry step into using a tablet because they can see the benefits.

**Barry:** Great reminder. Even though most who have them say they are valuable tools, less than one in five seniors still has an e-reader, according to Pew. Of course, if you are going that route, you might find a tablet that does more is a better gift and often without spending a whole lot more money.

There are a number of other tech gift ideas that might make sense now for some seniors. Do they have a computer that does what they need or even have one at all? If not, there are many more options that are senior friendly than in the past. Sure, that includes such things as the Telikin, which is designed with the needs of seniors in mind, but there are also all-in-one systems and laptops with touch built in that are very useful for those who don't want to use a mouse and those who prefer to minimize keyboard use.

Many windows-based computer options have touch capability today. I know Windows 8 has gotten some knocks but I've found it to be useful, even before the recent release of Windows 8.1 to overcome some of those issues.

**Kathy:** Keep in mind, too, that most of the Windows 8 issues are experienced by those who are upgrading from an earlier version of Windows and finding it very different. Somebody who had little or no interaction with either versions, or computers at all for that matter, may find Windows 8 to be much easier to use than someone using Windows computers for years.

**Barry:** Great point, Kathy. I hadn't thought about that in a while but it sure is true.

**Kathy:** We need to wrap up here soon, Barry, but I don't want to overlook an area of technology that gives many seniors hours of enjoyment plus gets them moving and exercise both their brain and body.

**Barry:** You're talking gaming systems, such as the Wii, of course Kathy. That's another great idea, especially since they have become so multifunctional. Many can be used for access to the web on TV and even show programming from such digital providers as YouTube, Netflix, Amazon, and many more.

Kathy's right, too, that it is about time to wrap up. I want to touch quickly, though, on a couple of non-tech gifts that family members might consider or that might give you other ideas about the need of your specific loved ones.

If your senior loved one is starting to have trouble getting around, you might want to look at getting them grab bars for the bathroom. They could be of use in the shower, tub and even toilet areas and make their lives both easier and safer. As an added bonus, many of us can make installation part of the gift, something we might want to do while we are visiting them for the holiday.

One other area to consider for the gift is the kitchen. With both eyesight and reach reduced for many who are aging, installing accessible shelving and even helping them

reorganize their kitchens may be a great gift. There are many ideas online and in stores you might want to consider.

Now I know we had to speed up at the end, but I hope we've given you a lot of food for thought in selecting the right gifts for senior loved ones this holiday season.

Kathy, you want to wrap us up with your quick tip?

**Kathy:** Indeed I do. Our quick tip today:

### **Fight Inflammation with Food**

It has been shown through research that inflammation in our bodies can lead to health risks such as heart disease and cancer. Inflammation is actually part of our immune response.

There are some foods that we can include on our menu to fight inflammation and improve aging health.

1. Fatty fish such as salmon, tuna and sardines which are rich in Omega 3 fatty acids. Naturally we want to eat them without frying such as having them baked or broiled. You could also include a fish oil supplement rich in Omega 3s.
2. Whole grains due to their fiber content. Whole grain should be the first ingredient.
3. Dark leafy green vegetables containing vitamin E such as kale, spinach, broccoli and greens.
4. Nuts especially almonds and walnuts due to their vitamin E and fiber content.
5. Edamame and soy milk due to the isoflavones they contain.
6. Tomatoes, colorful vegetables like beets and peppers, and garlic also contain compounds that fight inflammation.

Adding some of these foods to your daily diet can help your overall health in many ways and they taste good too!

**Barry:** Thanks Kathy, that's a great tip! You always seem to come up with some real good ones for us.

Well that's it for this episode folks. We appreciate you joining us at Senior Care Corner and I want to remind you before we go to take a look at the show notes. We're going to have a lot of specific ideas you can look at for topics for your holiday family meetings. But also if we don't have something there you want or if you want to look more in depth on the site for either meeting ideas or for technology questions on seniors. You may want to look at the search function on the website. That will bring up a lot of posts and other episodes for your information.

And until we see you next time, we hope you have a great day.