

The **POWER** of ATTORNEY PROJECT

Families are Complicated and Necessary

Welcome to the Power of Attorney Podcast which is part of our Conversations that Matter Podcasts. My name is Mary Bart, Chair of Caregiving Matters. This podcast is intended to provide general information only and is not intended to be a substitute for seeking personalized legal, financial or other advice. This podcast raises issues that our audience can further explore on their own in their own local communities with their own local experts. This project will help to be a call to action for families to solve their issues, find solutions to their problems, and have greater peace of mind.

Mary- Our guest expert is Audrey Miller and she is managing director of Elder Care Incorporated. Welcome Audrey and thank you for joining our project.

Audrey- My pleasure Mary. Thank you.

Mary- Could you please share a bit about your business with our audience?

Audrey- Absolutely. I am a social worker yet I consider myself a rehabilitation counsellor at heart and I started working in the field of rehabilitation in 1983 and I've been working with differently abled people since then, always as a care manager. In 2004, I founded elder caring as I found that people needed care management to help navigate the elder care system as well as the health care system. I have parents, one who is still alive and I'm in that sandwich generation where many of my friends and colleagues also find themselves in the same situation; dealing with elder care concerns about our parents and really worrying about how they are doing. Elder caring is a geriatric care management company and I'm fortunate enough to have counsellors which are registered social workers and occupational therapists in different cities across Canada and the focus is really about ensuring that your loved one is living as well as they can and providing you with options and resources.

Mary- Thank you for that and you know I'm glad that you mentioned you have resources across the country because this is a national project and so when people listen to you they'll be able to contact you and you will put them in touch with the resources that they need locally so again thank you for that. I'd like to begin with a couple of questions for you and my first one is, " why do families fight over care for a parent?"

Audrey- Great question Mary and it's complicated. We all have our family histories and we have our challenges within our families and as I like to say, most times, the only normal families are the families you don't know, meaning where we have our challenges, someone else also has their challenges. Often

times when I'm working with families they often want to know if they are the worst family I've ever seen and I chuckle because it's all part of what's normal and there's a big range of what's normal and children really typically want what's best for their parent but just don't know what that means so sometimes it's because sometimes it's because the wishes and desires of that parent haven't been communicated clearly. The other major issue is as I said earlier is the historical significance such as maybe mom loved you better or maybe the black sheep of the family who was never able to support themselves and continues perhaps to live in the basement of the family home compared to the other adult child who is a professional but feels that all the caregiving responsibilities are falling on their shoulders. It really takes both a community and a family to be able to support the transitional stages to ensure that the care that is required is being provided in a wholesome and safe environment to ensure that that older person is really and truly living as well as they can. The other point I wanted to make is that there are some commonalities that I find with families and often guilt is number one. Children many times don't feel that they can do enough and that's a big issue that we see with caregiver burnout and then there's worry. What if my parent doesn't agree with what I'd like to do? Or the refusal of accepting help and that's often another call that I receive for example the "I'm worried about my mom yet she refuses anything I offer and just says I'll be fine. Let me be" They may feel frustrated and worried about their parent's safety. Most times, love is not in question. It's just how it gets shared and how it gets expressed. The other big issue is fear. Fear of the unknown. Not knowing what's around the corner and on that piece I often say education is so important. Understanding what the disease process is about or what's going on with their parent if in fact they are noticing changes. The other piece of course is stress and sometimes the difficulty in being able to ask for help. Feelings like people have to do it alone and as you may know and I'm sure you do with all your work with seniors, most caregivers wait five years before seeking help. So there are some challenges to be on the same page for a plan of care for their parent.

Mary- My next question is, "what assistance is out there for families?"

Audrey- Well that too is a good question. It's a maze out there sometimes where the left hand and the right hand really don't know what they are doing. We are fortunate to be in Canada with our healthcare system, yet the healthcare system is often struggling to be able to keep up with the demands of our aging population and you know that seniors over age 85 are the fastest growing segment of the senior population so we are going to have parents who are living and declining and the last ten years of life tend to be where we are in the worst health and tend to need the most assistance and families have to figure out how long that journey is going to be. One of the things I find tends to help avoid familial conflict tends to be to gather your information and start the conversation. Start planning ahead. What is it that your mom wants? Do they want to remain in the family home for as long as possible? Have you ever discussed what a retirement setting might be like or what these things cost? That comes as a huge surprise to many in terms of what the cost of caring can be both of course, financially and emotionally. The beginning of the conversation is so critical and it's important to start it because at the point where a parent becomes incapacitated that's not the time to start wondering what it is they wished and so I see situations where a parent is not able to communicate and the children are fighting over what that parent might want especially as this is the power of attorney project, when there are

more than one adult child who is holding a power of attorney for either care or finance. That becomes a conflict quite often and in my world care should always be supported by finance but that doesn't always seem to happen that way. One of the things that geriatric care managers do is provide that holistic kind of assessment where a professional is able to go into the family home, sit down with the parent and the involved family members and hold a family meeting to figure out what the care issues are, who can contribute to what and what will it all look like in terms of a coordinated approach. We are offering now a wellness consultation to help adult children start the journey. In fact, just before this call I received a call from a daughter and the present that my sister and myself are giving to each other this year for Christmas is your introductory wellness consultation because they were at their wits end in not knowing what to do with mom. I look forward to meeting them and to be able to hear their caregiving journey and the challenges that they're experiencing and to give them some direction so they know what they can do or what their local resources are or start being informed about what they need to know. What's the difference in a retirement residence for example? What does long term care cost? How do I hire a caregiver? Do I go through an agency or do I hire privately? Those are all very common questions that families have and without having the conversation there's a lot of miscommunication and questions that don't get answered. One of the issues is advanced directives. What are someone's wishes when it comes to extraordinary care or involvement? Very timely with the supreme court decision about physician assisted death now no longer being banned it opens up the conversation I hope again so that adult children can communicate with their parents so that there's no surprises. Writing it down is key and ensuring that everyone knows where that important information is kept as well as those important papers for example both the power of attorney and the advanced directive. I am very happy to say that we've just set out our first wellness binder. We've developed a keeper of the information so that personal emergency contact, medical information, history about falls and surgeries are all documented and that's in the first part of the binder. Then in the second part of the binder, it talks about caring information. What do caregivers need to know about the parent? As you can appreciate, providing personal care to a parent is very different than a nanny providing personal care to a child and so the qualifications of who to hire are also included in this binder for information as well as the schedule of what the person likes. It would include behavioral concerns when they are starting to be noticed. How does it start? What does it look like? What's the preferred intervention? Then it concludes with helping families decide about retirement options so they have some questions to ask and then know how to make informed decisions. It's about gather the information so that children can understand what's out there and they're able to communicate more fully so we are fortunate that there's a lot of information out there. We have caregiving support groups out there, we have respite facilities, we have education but you have to know the questions to ask. That's one very key piece that I think goes a long way in helping families figure out what they need and of course the parent is always involved in this process and the family meeting is that very opportunity to be able to discuss the wishes, the concerns, the fears, the guilt that I mentioned earlier and so the purpose is to be able to put the family on the same page for a plan of care for the parent. I often get asked, " will you be able to improve my relationship with my brother or sister and I wish I could and if I could I'm sure I would be a multimillionaire. The reality is that a geriatric care manager is not going to change the interaction between the siblings but our objective is to develop a plan of care with the older person's best interests

at heart firstly so that the roles can be determined and a caregiving plan can be put in place to ensure that their loved one is doing as well as they possibly can.

Mary- Well thank you for that Audrey and I think that your new binder that you have created is so wonderful and families should access what you have in that binder to get organized. As a family caregiver myself, being organized is a key to sanity and it can also be used as a point of conversation for families and might make them just a little bit easier to start. We wish you great success with that new binder program.

Audrey- Thank you very much. The other interesting thing that I've just noticed and going through it personally in terms of involvement with the health care system. We advocate for our clients and navigating the health care system can be a challenge in terms of what questions do I have to ask the doctor or what is the history? So again having this information written down in a concise manner makes it very easy for you as the adult child to attend the specialist appointment with your parent, of course with their permission, so that you can hear what the specialist has to say and that too will help define the educational piece in terms of what is realistic. What is realistic in terms of what that parent can achieve or where they may be able to return to function or what's ahead in terms of their own journey.

Mary- Thank you for that. My next question is, "how do you know what a parent needs?"

Audrey- Well again I think it goes back to asking the questions and having an assessment done by a professional who can come in and put on the professional glasses to start with a home safety assessment and it is possible to get an assessment from the public sector depending on which province you live in but fall risks are a big concern for everyone and are the number one reason that seniors are admitted into the hospital and hospitals as we know are not great places for sick people. People want to be in their homes as long as possible so having a walk through the home as a starting point to ensure there are no trip hazards, that there's enough lighting, that there are grab bars, that accessibility issues have been addressed. Very simple steps but can go a very long way in preventing a fall or hip fracture. Similarly, case workers can be social workers or occupational therapists or other allied health professionals who are able to go in and complete that assessment. Part of the assessment process besides looking at the environment is looking at the functioning of that senior, the cognition of that senior, their emotional status as well as their physical status. At the end of the day it comes down to how well they are functioning so being able to obtain that care plan with recommendations that outline what that family's resources are both publicly available as well as what might be available privately to top up what we can get from the public sector is key. It works as a blueprint or guide to help families to make those kinds of decisions. Again, at the end of the day, it's about knowing what your options and resources are so you can make informed choices. There's nothing worse than being in a crisis and having choice removed from you so in this way we are trying to encourage the conversations about wishes being had. Understanding what the course of a disease might be and then being able to proactively look at what all the resources are available to that family. Finances do play a big part in this and certainly that's where powers of attorney come in choosing for that individual who they trust to make sure that person is acting on the older person's best wishes. What would they have wanted if they could answer for themselves and of course as you know it deals with capacity and incapacity and it's

very important for families to gather this information so that they have a plan that can also be adjusted because of course things can change. Having at least something started so a care manager can go in and tweak a plan if there is a change in medical condition or circumstance.

Mary- My final question for you is, “what happens when I don’t have family to step in? Can a friend take on that role?”

Audrey- Yes. We don’t all have families who are available to us or perhaps who we feel are capable of managing our care or finances to the best of their abilities so many times we do have friends step up to the plate often in a shared role and there have been some beautiful situations where we have been able to help powers of attorney work with a friend but share the responsibility of making the decisions together because they now have someone who can guide them in the process. The other part is that people are living longer so we see that families are moving into different parts of the country and it’s very difficult to know who can I count on or who is available so friends can certainly step in as a power of attorney for care or finance. What we often see in the work I do because I am involved with lawyers and estate attorneys that when families are in significant conflict and there are lawsuits we are asked to come in and do a functional living assessment which is like a plan of care but more detailed and often times it is a financial institution is named to hold POA for finance and a friend might be appointed for care.

Mary- Thank you for that and I think people will be very interested in this topic. Could you share your contact information with our audience please?

Audrey- Absolutely, the website is www.eldercaring.ca There are a host of videos and articles as well as blogs that I encourage you to read and look at so you can start to feel empowered to begin to make informed decisions and at least know the questions to ask. Our toll free line is 1-866-473-8887. Thank you, Mary.

Mary-I would like to wrap up with some closing remarks and that is that Chris Kata, one of our board of directors and I would now like to share a few closing comments.

Chris - Mary, who are our initial project supporters?

Mary – We wish to acknowledge that this project is funded in part by the government of Canada’s New Horizons for Seniors Program. Our other initial supporters include Care Connect, The Care Guide, The Healing Cycle Foundation and Scotiatrust. Caregiving Matters is an internet based registered Canadian Charity dedicated to educating and supporting family caregivers. 90% of our work is done online and by leveraging technologies. 10% is done by producing local educational events. We leverage technologies in everything that we do ensuring greater reach and sustainability. I trust that we have given some of the highlights of our exciting new initiative. If you are interested in speaking with me about the project, please let me know. We look forward to your questions and your ideas.

Chris - Mary, if listeners have questions, what is the best way for them to contact us?

Mary Bart- You can contact me directly Mary Bart, Chair of Caregiving Matters at 905-939-2931. My email is mary@caregivingmatters.ca and our website is www.caregivingmatters.ca