

# From Crisis to Breakthrough

A Patient's Journey

By Amy Seigel, RN, CCM

This real life case study highlights four key areas where an effective Care Manager can assist seniors and their families with needed support.

Sally K's family consulted Advocare, an Aging Life Care Management company, when she was only 73 years old. Sally had recently undergone surgery for stomach cancer. Prior to her surgery, Sally had been a very active and vibrant woman. While the procedure was successful in treating her cancer, the follow up treatment made Sally extremely ill.

Each and every day brought debilitating nausea, disturbing side effects, and even occasional suicidal thoughts. The treatment that defeated her disease had left her absolutely exhausted and depressed; with every day a struggle.

Sally was unable to enjoy a meal, visit with friends or even sit calmly and read a book. Her symptoms plagued her from the moment she awoke, and became more intense throughout the day. She found relief only when she was once again able to fall asleep with the help of strong sedation.

All three of her adult children lived in the northeast, and they jointly made a decision to hire Advocare as a local medical and care advocate for Sally. Advocare's **Medical Care Management** began with a thorough assessment documenting Sally's medical history and current issues and concerns.

During the initial assessment, it was discovered that she was on over 25 medications prescribed by 5 different specialist doctors. Sally was unclear as to what medications were to be decreased or increased depending on her symptoms and what her plan to recover was. She was on several medications to control nausea; however some of those meds were worsening her symptoms.

Advocare recommended that a Nurse Advocate begin to work together with Sally to address these issues while accompanying her to key physician appointments to review her status with each specialist. Advocare obtained medical records from her doctors and began to communicate with them regarding their treatment plan and objectives.

In that process it became apparent that one or two of her physicians did not wish to work collaboratively to address Sally's medical issues. They had "done all they could do." Sally's family now understood that it was time to find practitioners that would work as a team to help her. They authorized Advocare to select new specialists that had deeper experience and a more committed approach to her specific issues.

Once Advocare has established this new team of doctors; these practitioners now had the benefit of having sufficient information to work in a coordinated fashion. The Care Manager kept all practitioners informed of other specialists' input and as a result, together created a new medical treatment plan, even integrating an alternative therapy regimen.

By taking advantage of this brain trust of highly experienced physicians, each prominent in their specific specialty and techniques; it was determined that not all of Sally's issues were stemming from physical problems. It was further determined that Sally's response to stress and emotional coping skills resulted in her symptoms of nausea.

Advocare worked with this team of practitioners to combine biofeedback, psychological counseling, and natural nausea therapy treatments. Now that care was coordinated and harmonized among several experts in their field, a new medication regimen was developed. This plan actually reduced many of the strongest medications in her pharmacological arsenal, including those with significant side effects.

Over the next few months, Sally, supported by her Nurse Care Manager,

followed this new care plan diligently. Together with her Care Manager and her physicians, they continuously fine tuned this plan. After three months, there was a new “Sally” who now stated that she was beginning to see the possibilities that she could get her prior life back.

At that time, it was determined that Sally and her husband Michael needed a bit more assistance with daily tasks such as meal preparation and light housekeeping. Advocare’s **Home Care Management** team worked with Sally and Michael using a “matchmaking approach” to interview several candidates.

This collaborative approach presented several candidates to Sally and Michael, encouraging their active involvement in the decision of choosing someone that would be working in their private home. Together with their Care Manager, they identified a caring and competent caregiver that truly matched their personal preferences and needs.

This additional help around the home worked wonders to lighten the load on Michael. Although he never complained, it was clear that he felt an enormous burden lifted. He had been trying so hard to support his wife of more than fifty years, and this had lately taken a toll in the form of stress and exhaustion.

Over the next six months, Sally, who as previously unable to participate in any activity, was able to take short walks with her husband, eat a small meal at the table with friends and enjoy reading again. At this point, Sally informed us that she was feeling “90% better than when Advocare began working with her” – on most days.

By this time, Advocare’s week to week role had lessened significantly, as Sally had successfully navigated out of the crisis stage. However at this point Sally’s Nurse Care Manager did notice that going to the grocery store several times a week and taking care of the condo was becoming

very taxing for her.

Her clubhouse, where in the past she had met her friends, now felt too far. Furthermore, her friends played cards in the evening and now she and her husband were no longer comfortable driving at nighttime, and they did not wish to have outside care in their home twenty four hours per day.

Advocare's **Transition Care Management** team began working with Sally and Michael to assist them to understand assisted living options where they could still be close to their friends and community. Sally and Michael, upon arriving to Florida, had moved to their large senior living community as active retirees, when they were quite social and actively participating in community events.

At this point in time, however, their care needs had become more of a priority. Advocare's Transition Care Management team worked together with Sally, Michael and their children to create a realistic plan to move to an Assisted Living community. The family stated that, due to the stress associated with moving, they wanted to do this "just once," meaning they wanted a community where their parents could age in place for the rest of their lives.

This process also involved **Life Care Planning**, carefully reviewing and analyzing all of their assets, monthly income and expenses, insurance benefits, and other potential payment sources such as VA entitlements. By doing Life Care Planning, existing assets were repurposed so that Sally and Michael could afford a community that previously they had felt was out of reach.

In reviewing assisted living options, several criteria were established, including proximity to friends and to her team of doctors that had made her life so much better. After reviewing all of the facts with their Care

Manager and family, Sally and Michael made a decision to move to a beautiful two bedroom apartment in an Assisted Living community in their community.

Today, they dine with others in a beautiful restaurant quality dining room. Sally and her husband each attend various activities of special interest to them. They attend social and educational programs daily as well as yoga, chair stretching programs, and art classes.

Since their move, Sally was voted Community council director of her building and she believes this role has motivated to exercise her sharp memory and keen sense of humor ongoing. She continues periodic visits with her RN care manager to assure that her medical care plan remains stable. Their care manager meets with them at critical physician appointments and is on call for them 24/7 in case of emergency.

Recently, Sally sustained a fall at night and her Advocare Nurse Care Manager met her at the emergency room to assist her in relaying her very delicate and complicated medical history to the attending physician.

Although there are still bumps in the road, Sally and Michael are determined to make the most of their time. Sally and her family believe that if not for Advocare's collaborative care management support, Sally would not be here today enjoying her life with her husband and spending quality visits with both her grandchildren and her great-grandchildren.

By establishing a long term plan to optimize care and address issues quickly as they arise, life is better for Sally and Michael – as well as for their distant children and family.

A.Seigel R.N 11/13/2017