



*Bringing Light to Eldercare*

***“The plight of elder Americans and their families has already reached major media attention because of the critical need for vastly improved and modified care options. We who are increasingly at the center of the cry for - if not revolution then at least reformation- of the elder care industry are the ‘baby-boomers,’ the ‘can do’ generation. This industry will respond to our demands for more choices, for better choices.” \****

***“More and more people live compromised if not agonizing lives because we, as a culture, have not come to grips with the pressing and controversial matters at hand. But what of quality of life? If we are to postpone the truly hard decisions, we must at least make sure that elder and challenged persons are free of pain, boredom and despair.” \****

***“Aging baby-boomers are sometimes referred to as the ‘sandwich’ generation. They often must care for and subsidize aging parents while still providing for their own collegiate and adult children.” \****

Excerpts: *“Conscious Care Systems: Long-term Care as it Must Be” Marie Eisele*

## *Conscious Care Systems* *Engineering Eldercare*

### **Aging for Dummies -**

#### **Elder or Elderly? Today’s Choices are Tomorrow’s Reality**

The aging experience differs dramatically in various cultures and times. Why? What are the factors that determine how we age – and how we relate to the process of growing older. Do we become elderly or do we become elders? In the West – especially in America we generally have a condescending attitude toward the old. Yet theirs is the generation of individuals who quite literally redeemed our world from the unspeakable and unfathomable ravages of the Third Reich, imperialist Japan and the Axis powers. The extreme hardships that these men and women endured overseas and at home are inconceivable to us today, yet we owe our way of life and the freedom to pursue our happiness to their great sacrifice. How is it then that we reward this heroic generation by relegating many to substandard institutions where they often endure boredom, isolation and humiliation? Our parents and grandparents deserve to be cherished, to be venerated, to be loved. They are surely our nation’s greatest *hidden* treasure.

And isn’t it ironic that the progeny of those vanquished in the *Great War* inherit and generally continue their cultural tradition of paying homage to and caring for their elders while *we* generally view our seniors as expendable, burdensome and of little value? Persons advanced in age should surely be exalted in status – that this perception is the exception in our society is tragic and profligate not only for our elders but for we who do not recognize their worth and wisdom nor seek to benefit from their wealth of life experience.

That this Western mindset needs to shift is obvious. We cannot afford to discard those whose wisdom and insights we need more than ever in an increasingly demanding and materialistic world. Our society must also provide opportunities for elder productivity as we cannot continue to fiscally support individuals who on average live 10 – 30 years beyond retirement. Today’s retirees often exhaust the amount of money they paid into government programs within the first few years of their retirement. With many baby boomers already collecting Social Security and Medicare benefits, and the ratio of payers vs. recipients continuing to diminish dramatically – from 16 to 1 in 1950, to 3 to 1 today, (soon to be *2 to 1*), we are facing potential disaster – many forecast generational war.

P.O. Box 76 High Bridge, NJ 08829 \*(908) 619-3292 (908) 452-9065  
e mail: Marie@CCS-CARES.com © Marie Eisele

We can surely rectify many of the problems facing individuals and society if we make the commitments necessary to effect real change – *now*. Our current dilemmas – profound as they may be – do not compare to those facing us in the very near and inevitable future.

So what to do?

First of all, we must begin to take responsibility for our own aging process. (You knew there was a catch, right?) Healthy aging at its best will encompass modalities that support a synthesis of body, mind and spirit. Natural nutrition with supplementation, and exercise – especially mindful movement such as yoga, tai chi, chi gong, Pilates, and dance will go far to ensure a healthy body. Taking advantage of the huge web of holistic health practitioners, modalities and products will enable individuals to enjoy optimal health at any age. An inquiring and open mind can lead to personal fulfillment and a balanced approach to life. Maintaining patterns of continuous learning has proven to grow new brain dendrites and to keep the mind young and vital. (Learning a new language or instrument has been proven to be especially effective in expanding brain function.) And, most important, contemplation and/or spirituality will provide the ultimate foundational center and add richness to one's later years. These elements of Body, Mind and Spirit are, of course, interwoven – each affecting and enhancing the other. Living lives in balance – physically, mentally and spiritually will ensure that elders remain productive longer, and removed from an exorbitant healthcare system which even today instills fear and loathing in so many.

The fiscal benefits to individuals and society will be substantial and fear of the ravages of old age – physical and mental disease and the loss of independence – will be greatly diminished in this new paradigm. Individuals who do become dependent or in need of services will receive care at later stages of life and will ideally come to view this last mortal phase as a time of serenity, acceptance, contemplation and joyful preparation. This is indeed possible and is, in fact, the natural order in cultures where elders are revered, and the people believe that they are *spiritual* beings having a *physical* experience. Returning to the embrace of Spirit, God or simply returning to the earth - *dust to dust* – may be cause for joyous - or at least calm - surrender. It may be seen as a return to the origin of peace, of rest, of bliss. We as individuals and as a society can change the Western archetypes that keep us in fear and separation from our true nature. Realization of this tenet of most religions – that we are truly the embodiment of the divine – or even recognition that we are clearly personifications of the natural world – may be empowering to be sure, yet responsibility for everything in our sphere of existence, in our lives and in our hearts is also inherent in this knowledge.

Ironically, despite rampant cultural ageism, we actually have the opportunity to create ideal conditions for *conscious aging* and *Conscious Care*. We have the resources to develop caregiving environments and in-home services that will enable frail or challenged individuals to enjoy optimum lifestyles and opportunities to grow and evolve while remaining free of pain and as autonomous as possible. That this has yet to be accomplished is a discredit – even disgrace to us and our culture, and a dishonor to our elders. Our parents and grandparents did not have the luxury of maturing during a time of openness and awakening. We boomers and our children have been exposed to a myriad of experiences, belief systems, psychological realms and personal freedoms that even now are beyond the ability of most elders to fathom. It is now up to us – from our vantage of privilege and responsibility – to change the face of aging and care of the aging in our culture.

There are many of us who are taking up this challenge in direct and indirect ways. Conscious Care Systems (CCS), a company founded for this purpose, is committed to systemic change in many fields (holistic wellness, prevention, lifestyle, education, technology, etc.) and considers CCS and other innovative companies and organizations as springboards to our cultural goal of transforming the social fabric. Existing long-term care facilities will ideally become virtual local community centers, and we can co-create - with other progressive groups, businesses and individuals - intergenerational *villages* and neighborhoods that help proliferate logical, sustainable, even somewhat utopian solutions to some of the most vexing issues and dilemmas of our critical and precarious times.

### How to Prepare for a Blissful Aging Experience – Nuts & Bolts.

- Take responsibility for one's physical, psychological and spiritual health. Devote time and *resources* to realizing the highest levels of wellness and joy - Body, Mind and Spirit. What can take precedence over this? Ferraris, Cancun and Italian Villas of course come to mind, but it may be wise to weigh the benefits of good physical and mental health against expenditures-even more modest ones-that may preclude one from having access to proven Integrative Medicine modalities and the many holistic products and services now available but are still mostly private pay.
- Make legal preparations. Write a *detailed* advance directive or living will and keep it on your person and in the hands of your children, spouse, lawyer, hospital and healthcare proxy. Authorize a healthcare proxy and be certain that he/she knows and will *carry out* your wishes. Discuss with your loved ones openly your wishes. Such conversations can be gateways to deeper relations and to facing and resolving fears and interpersonal issues. Potential familial disagreements and feelings of guilt which often arise during critical situations when decisions must be made will also be minimized through this process.
- Seek legal advice from a qualified elder advisor regarding specific issues and for assistance in identifying and accessing multiple resources and options. A lawyer specializing in elder law is generally worth his or her weight in gold when preparing for the future. Even those without significant assets may be well-advised to seek the services of a well-recommended and experienced attorney. The internet is an excellent resource for information and can be accessed at local and college libraries. Libraries often give computer and internet access classes and librarians are usually happy to help individuals to navigate.
- Explore congregate living and care options such as:
  - Continuing Care Retirement Communities (CCRCs)
  - Assisted Living Facilities
  - Independent Living Options
  - Skilled Nursing Centers
  - Congregate Living Communities

- Board & Care Homes (also known as retirement, adult or elderly homes)
- Foster Care Homes
- Co-Housing Communities and Neighborhoods ([www.fellowshipcommunity.org](http://www.fellowshipcommunity.org), [threefold.org/our-community/community-directory](http://threefold.org/our-community/community-directory), [www.camphillghent.org](http://www.camphillghent.org))
- Group Homes
- Elderly Cottage Housing Opportunity (ECHO)
- Adult Day Services (also known as Adult Daycare)
- In-Home Health services
- Community Care Services (and sub-services like Pharmaceutical Subsidies, and Meals on Wheels)

➤ Determine the best possible options and the length of waiting lists. Put loved ones on several waiting lists long before need is determined, especially as the better facilities often have lengthy lists. Names can be recycled if the individual is not ready for placement. Be realistic about eventualities. Even families that are committed to caring for their loved ones at home often find it impossible to do so when the time comes, (although increasing government emphasis on homecare services now make this a more viable option). Around the clock skilled nursing care may be needed which is covered by Medicaid in nursing facilities but not at home; the circumstances of a potential familial caregiver may have changed; individuals may underestimate the magnitude of care-giving responsibilities; or it may be in the best interest of the loved one to be placed in an alternative environment.

➤ Become educated about:

- *Long-term care in general* - Visit multiple nursing centers, independent and assisted living facilities, CCRCs (see Lifecare Options), etc. Ask a lot of questions – spend time getting a sense of the facility and its staff, and in determining what really goes on all day – and night.
- *Medicare and Medicaid* – these are very different programs and it is essential to know what they entail long before they are needed.
- *Hospice* – what does hospice have to offer relative to varied prognoses and circumstances, and how to ensure that loved ones are covered as soon as possible.
- *Pain Management* – pros and cons of various methods and medications, and barriers to access. Know the legalities of palliative care, the legal rights of individuals and how to circumvent doctors' reticence to proscribe certain meds, especially narcotics. Early entry into hospice – a six-month life expectancy prognosis is usually the criteria – will enable patients to have easier access to effective palliative care, as well as increased attention to quality of life and avoidance of acute care hospitals.
- *Departments of Aging (Offices on Aging) and Ombudsman* organizations – these have a wealth of information about facilities, services, organizations, websites, etc., and can provide invaluable assistance in negotiating the maze of care options, as well as recourse for elder related issues.

- Realize that it is the natural order for children to care for parents. The aversion to becoming a burden to one's children is unfortunate, even tragic in many cases. The act of caregiving especially in a supportive environment with various support services such as Adult Day Services, may be considered a privilege and an opportunity for growth and personal fulfillment. This time may well be the culmination of a lifelong loving relationship or an awakening to bonds that were never before fully recognized. Familial struggles, misunderstandings and emotional distance often dissolve in the face of mortality and earth-time running out. What a gift we may give each to the other in these moments – whatever their duration.
  
- We owe it to ourselves, to each other, to our cultures, to our essential spirit personified, to enrich the lives of elders and to ease the burdens of caregivers, embracing all means – material, psychological and spiritual – to bring us and our loved ones into harmony, forgiveness and a sense of community and oneness with each other.

The losing of one's physical and mental powers need not be perceived as a tragic journey ending in a tragic death. In time everything falls away as we move closer to death – to the proverbial light. If we can accept that this decline is natural, and if we are able to see death as the final reprieve and even as an ultimate merging with Consciousness / Spirit / God – *whatever* our conception may be - then we can begin to release our greatest trepidations. As our outward attributes are diminished, we may go deeper within – to our wellspring of love, faith and inner strength. Freedom from physical pain and comforting, evocative living environments will enable our elders, and in time ourselves, to age in joy, security, and in many traditions - the glorious embrace of the Great Spirit, to realize at last – our own *true* selves.

Marie Eisele