

Area Agency on Aging *Connections*

Care managers provide good safety net for seniors

By Gina Mazza Hillier
For *Pittsburgh Senior News*

As a film and stage actor who worked with legends like Ava Gardner and Gene Kelly, Benjamin Tatar, 79, of Highland Park was accustomed to traveling around the world independently. He lived in Madrid, Paris and other famed locations while shooting movies such as *The Battle of the Bulge* and *The Longest Day*. In 1963, he was Gardner's confidential secretary, attending to details of her personal affairs.

So it was quite a change for Benjamin when he was the one who needed assistance with personal matters. About 10 years ago, suffering from progressive scoliosis and unable to find work, Benjamin discovered the care management services available to seniors through the Department of Human Services Area Agency on Aging (DHS AAA). "I realized that I needed some help and with all my family members deceased, I decided to see what AAA had to offer," he says, adding that having a care manager gives him a sense of comfort. "I currently receive homemaker services and supplies every other month—Ensure and some other things."

As with Benjamin, many older adults want to get the assistance they need but may fear losing their autonomy. It's the biggest reason why seniors may hesitate to sign up for care management services, according to Kara Snyder-Keane, AAA family caregiver support program coordinator. "They don't want others to make decisions for them and they're concerned that once they enter the system, it's going to be this slippery slope," she comments. "But that's not the case. The most important thing to bear in mind is that you, as the consumer, have total control over the process."

Said another way, care managers can make recommendations and help to evaluate your needs, thereby assisting with a variety of health, home and personal matters; however, it's never mandatory to comply with these recommendations. "Care managers can offer a selection of choices but they cannot make those choices for you," Kara explains. "For instance, we can refer seniors to the APPRISE program to figure out what kind of health insurance they might need but we can't

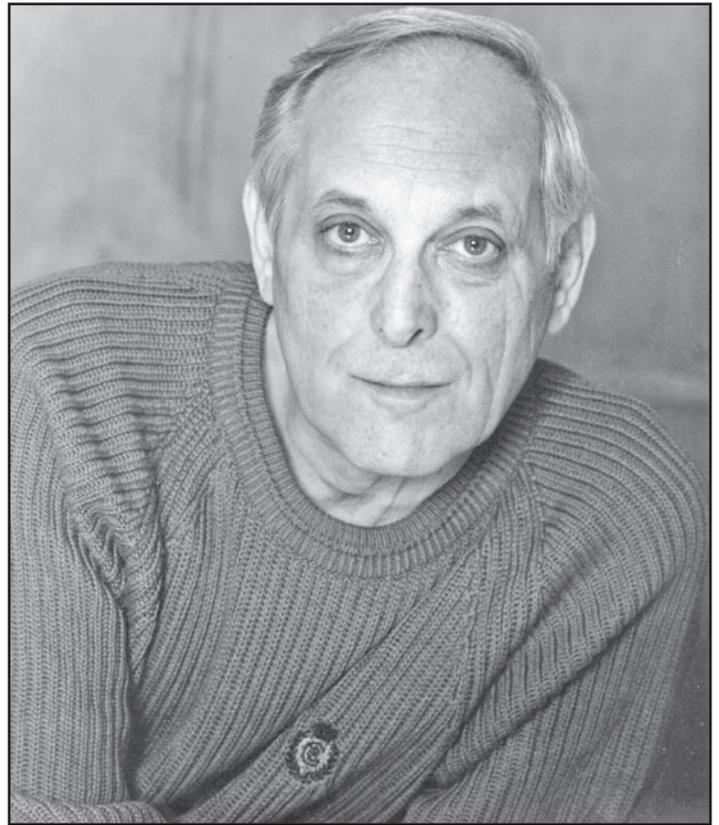


Photo provided by Benjamin Tatar

Having a care manager gives Benjamin Tatar a sense of comfort.

say which insurance company they should pick. With homemaking services, we would share a list of providers, but the individual would choose which company they'd like to provide the service. The whole process is empowering and is meant to keep autonomy in the consumer's hands."

In fact, the ultimate self-empowering approach to ensuring one's continued ability to live independently is to check into care management well before it's needed. "People tend to wait until a crisis happens to get care management set up, then they expect the services to begin immediately—but it doesn't function like that," Kara explains. Services generally take a week or more to start, and some have waiting lists. You may be asked to share in the cost of some services based on sliding scale.

When should you inquire? If you're a healthy adult and things are going well, now is the time to make initial

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contact and have a care manager assigned to you. (Spouses can request the same care manager.) “You don’t have to actually get services at first,” Kara says. “Your assigned care manager will call or visit you every six months to assess your changing needs. Then as things happen—say you have a fall and are going to be laid up for eight weeks, and you need home-delivered meals or help cleaning your house—your care manager can not only set those things up but can mediate or help you find another provider when things aren’t working out with the agency you’ve chosen.”

Care managers can also help with financial, medical and other general personal matters. “Maybe you’re homebound and need to find a doctor who makes house visits,” Kara says. “Or maybe you have vision problems and need someone to help write out your checks. Maybe you need a home exterminator or assistance preparing your taxes—but you don’t know where to find help for these things. Your care manager can guide you. If you’re looking for senior housing, care managers have access to valuable information and housing resources that may be very useful to you. There are all sorts of great programs that care managers can introduce you to—like senior centers and AARP programs. They can even advocate on your behalf with your doctor. Care managers are a really good safety net.” *PSN*

Candidates for AAA care management must be age 60 and be a resident of Allegheny County. To learn more, call SeniorLine at (412) 350-5460.

What to bring when meeting your care manager:

- copies of your tax returns and bank statements
- list of assets
- list of any medications you are taking
- list of your medical conditions
- your doctor’s name and contact information
- your insurance cards
- emergency contact persons
- any questions you may have for the care manager

SeniorLine Closeup



How do . . . friends and family obtain services for a senior?

Because life circumstances can sometimes change quickly for seniors, it may be necessary for friends and family to secure services so their elder loved ones can continue to live in the community. A call to the SeniorLine at (412) 350-5460 or 1 (800) 344-4319 can get this process started.

Here are some some important things to do in advance to make the process a smooth one. First, get the senior’s consent to have an assessment, which is an in-home interview with a care manager. (An assessment cannot occur without this consent.) An intake will be done over the phone with a care manager. This helps to provide background information and preliminarily determine to how the senior’s needs can best be met.

An intake includes basic demographic information such as the senior’s name, address, phone number, date of birth, Social Security number, monthly income, assets (excluding house or car), primary physician’s phone number, medical conditions and type of health insurance. The care manager will then ask questions about the seniors’ ability to complete various activities.

The intake process takes about 20 to 30 minutes. Once all this information is compiled, it is forwarded to the appropriate office and a care manager will follow up within 10 business days to schedule an in-home assessment.

Call SeniorLine today. We look forward to helping you!