Looking Ahead

Very few people want to consider the death of a loved one, much less their own death. However, the fact remains that we will all die at some point. As a caregiver of someone unable to care for themselves it is very important for you to think about emergency and end of life issues.

Advanced Directives

An advanced directive or Living Will is a written directive instructing your doctors when you want them to stop life-sustaining medical treatment and let you die. It can take effect only if you are terminally ill and will die soon, or if you are in a permanent unconscious condition. Procedures needed to ease pain are not affected by a Living Will (treatment may be given to ease pain). Whatcom Alliance for Health Advancement (WAHA) offers free help in completing advanced directives for Whatcom County residents. (360) 788-6526. All Washington State residents can find out more information on advanced directives at http://wsma.org/wcm/For_Patients/wcm/Patients/For_Patients_and_Physicians.aspx?hkey=c3062005-4237-43d5-92df-128b2964451d

Family Caregiver Emergency Plan

The Northwest Regional Council offers a family caregiver emergency planning tool. The form, Emergency Information About My Care Receiver, helps you as a caregiver think through who would take care of your loved one should something happen to you, indicates where you keep important papers, and lists important parts of the daily routine to share with others. For a copy of this family caregiver emergency form please contact your local Senior Services office: Whatcom 360-376-6749, Skagit 360-428-1301, San Juan 360-370-0591, or Island 360-321-1600.
Burial/ Cremation Policies

Most funeral homes offer a wide variety of services, the lowest cost option being direct cremation. Contact your local Area Agency on Aging for a list of service providers in your area, Whatcom 360-376-6749, Skagit 360-428-1301, San Juan 360-370-0591, or Island 360-321-1600.

Important Note:
Direct cremation usually includes only very basic services such as cremation of the deceased, the cremation container and temporary storage of cremated remains. Washington State Law RCW 68.50.160 states that relatives are responsible for the cost of disposal of remains in descending order from surviving spouse and adult children.

Other Resources:

Attorney General's Office: 1-800-551-4636 or (locally) (360) 738-6185. Excellent resource for general information and guidelines regarding after death issues. When unsure who to call, this office may be able to provide direction. For answers to many questions, see Dealing With Death at the website of the Washington Attorney General: www.atg.wa.gov

Internal Revenue Service: 1-800-829-1040. Filing of federal income tax of the deceased person is due at the same time as when the individual was usually filing. A surviving spouse may want to seek information regarding filing a joint return to utilize potential tax savings for the year of the death. A free tax booklet Tax Information for Survivors, Executors and Administrators (publication #559) may prove helpful. Call the IRS office with questions regarding these and other issues or to request the tax booklet. Internet address: http://www.irs.gov/

Social Security Administration: 1-800-772-1213. There is a small death payment for covered individuals. This payment is made to an eligible surviving widow, widower or entitled child. The surviving spouse may also be eligible to draw on the account of the deceased wage earner for social security income. Call to discuss this and other social security questions. Internet address: http://www.ssa.gov/

US Dept. of Veteran's Affairs: 1-800-827-1000. Funeral or widow's benefits may be payable to the surviving family of a deceased, qualifying veteran. To expedite your inquiry have information regarding the Veteran’s military record, i.e. serial number, branch of service, service dates, etc. Internet address: http://www.va.gov/