

Paperweight Perspective

Who Will Shout for Me?



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The practicalities of planning for the aging population in the UK occupy the minds of a my-

riad of charitable organisations. All of them know that with improved healthcare - aside from the setbacks brought on by Corona, comes a longer life for many people.

With that comes the recognition that an older generation absorbs a disproportionate amount of health, welfare and practical resources for which the state system is totally unprepared. Health and social care services are predicated upon the implicit assumption that it is families who fill the gaps in service provision and in the case of older people particularly, that the people supporting them are largely their adult children.

Adult children provide help in different ways: from low-level support tasks such as accompanying a parent to medical appointments (a hospital trip can be an

entire day's event), helping with cleaning and shopping, reminding their parent to take medication and some personal care tasks, such as changing dressings, to high-level support from mediating with health and social services, looking after their parent's domestic bureaucracy, general advocacy and finances, to being their part-time or even full time carer.

Adding another wrinkle to the mix: many children of this longer-living age group are themselves growing older. And they have busy and often complicated lives, and maybe their own medical requirements too. Today, it is common for many to live at a distance or overseas from their parents, and have a younger generation of grandchildren to additionally

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assist. And whilst one of the tenets of Jewish society is having a high regard for the elderly and an implicit understanding of the meaning and value of "honouring one's father and mother", the practicalities of doing so can be very challenging.

Consequently, people ageing even with a notional support network often find themselves high and dry.

The difficulty of arranging for all the support and benefits that are available can be quite overwhelming. If you add into this mix another very worrying statistic, we have the ingredients of a perfect storm - even in a community that takes justifiable pride in looking after each other. Currently in the UK, one in six of the over 80s have dementia in one form or

another. This as we know, manifests itself in a range of symptoms from occasional forgetfulness to full blown Alzheimer's and its miserable and soul-destroying effects. The healthy partner of an octogenarian dementia sufferer has an impossible burden, and calling upon younger generations is an uncomfortable and often unworkable stop-gap.

As ever, financial matters remain one of the last taboos, and discussions on this can be fraught. The tension that builds up across the generations often results in a fracturing of the family bonds. Sometimes, through a combination of timing and family dynamics and of course geography, these new crises take the elderly to a new and even lower ebb. And they realise they need someone to step in and advocate for them.

And they will cry, to everyone and no-one, in addressing a fragile future with regard to the help they may need, "I wonder who will shout for me?"

And a good starting point, in many and varied circumstances, is Paperweight, who will shoulder the challenging mix of old age and bureaucracy and shout very loud indeed.

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