

## Caring For Mom And Dad As They Grow Older: What Baby Boomers Need To Know About Geriatric Health Care

by David Reuben, M.D.

(NAPS)— I often get letters, like the two below, from Baby Boomers who are caring for aging parents and trying to find health care that meets the unique needs of older people. Finding the right kind of care can seem daunting, but a little information and some key resources can help tremendously.

**Q: My 81-year old mother recently fell and was rushed to the emergency room. The doctor who saw her suggested that she start seeing a geriatrician. What is a geriatrician and why should she see one?**

A: A geriatrician is a physician with special training and expertise in caring for older adults, especially those with complex health problems. Like children, older adults have unique health care needs. As we age, our bodies change in many ways that affect our health. Among other things, we're more likely to develop chronic health problems such as heart disease, diabetes and arthritis, and to need multiple medications (all with potential side effects). About 80 percent of adults 65 or older have at least one chronic health condition and 50 percent have at least two. As we grow older it's also harder for us to recover from illnesses.

**Q: I've tried to find a geriatrician for my parents but haven't had any luck. Why aren't there more geriatricians? What should I do?**

A: Today, there are fewer than 7,000 practicing geriatricians in the US. That's about one geriatrician for every 5,000 adults over age 65. Finding a geriatrician is likely to become even more difficult over the next 20 years, as the nation's 77 million Baby Boomers reach retirement age. To prepare for this "Aging Boom" we need to



Dr. David Reuben

support programs that both train geriatricians and better prepare all health care providers to care for older adults. Until recently, the federal government's "Title VII" geriatric health professions program did just that, by supporting geriatric education centers and young medical school faculty who trained medical students, primary care physicians, nurses, pharmacists, and other providers to better meet the health care needs of older adults. Unfortunately, Congress eliminated all funding for this program in late 2005. We need to restore this funding—for the sake of all older Americans.

For help finding a geriatrician, contact the AGS Foundation for Health in Aging by calling 1-800-563-4916 or visiting the FHA Web site at [www.healthinaging.org](http://www.healthinaging.org). The Foundation offers a free referral service that helps people find geriatricians in their areas.

*David Reuben, MD, is the President of the New York City-based American Geriatrics Society and Archstone professor of medicine, chief of geriatrics, and director of the Multicampus Program in Geriatric Medicine and Gerontology at the David Geffen School of Medicine at the University of California at Los Angeles.*

### Healthy Ideas

Older Americans with health concerns or those caring for aging parents would be wise to consult a geriatrician. A geriatrician is a physician with special training and expertise in health issues affecting older adults. For help finding a geriatrician, you can contact the American Geriatrics Society Foundation for Health in Aging by calling (800) 563-4916 or visiting the FHA Web site at [www.healthinaging.org](http://www.healthinaging.org).

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10