

## The case of Emily Warren

### Background

Emily Warren is 88 years old and lives in her own home with her son who is in his early 50's. Emily has been your patient at the surgery for the last year, and is now house bound. She is fairly frail, and has advanced dementia meaning that she requires full time care. Her son is currently unemployed and is providing her care.

You carry out a home visit to see Emily because she is suffering from confusion following a recent urine infection. You speak to Emily's son, and it is clear he is becoming increasingly frustrated looking after her. He says that she wanders off, and knocks things over round the house so he finds it difficult to have time to do anything as he is having to watch her constantly. Although he admits Emily would probably be better off living in a residential or nursing home, he doesn't want to sell the house to pay for her care, because he would then be on the street.

### Questions

What issues can families face in terms of balancing caring responsibilities with finances?

What would you do in this situation?

In this situation the first step taken was to gather further information

You discuss the care options that could be available to provide further support, but the son is adamant that there is no spare money to pay for Emily to have any formal care. He admits he is in effect dependent on his mother for financial support as the house belongs to her and he can't find a job. Although he stays at home with her during the day, it seems that the situation has deteriorated recently, as he now has difficulty helping her upstairs to bed, and so tends to leave her downstairs on her own. He admits to having locked her in the lounge on occasions so that he is able to do things around the house without her getting in his way.

Emily is a widow and although she has a daughter, her son holds lasting power of attorney to manage her financial affairs as the daughter is no longer in contact with the family. You are concerned that her son is not acting in her best interests by continuing to provide care himself when he is struggling to cope. Although it is clear he is trying to do his best, the situation seems to be taking it's toll on his health in addition to concerns about whether Emily is being cared for adequately.

### Questions

Do you think the son's actions are motivated by his financial dependence on his mother's money?

What would you do next?

### In this instance, social services were contacted

In order to explore care options, you contact social services with Emily's son's approval. Social services carried out a home visit to go through what options were available, such as visits to the local day center, or arranging for a carer to visit for an hour a day so that the son could have more of a break. Social services spent a lot of time with Emily and her son trying to work out what would be in everyone's best interests, but found it difficult to get the son to commit to any formal arrangements because of the financial implications. Eventually he agrees that she should visit the day center twice a week.

You also contact a local voluntary organisation who provide a befriending service for carers, as they can also arrange to visit Emily at home for a few hours a week so that the son can go out and do things like food shopping. Although you feel that Emily would benefit from having increased help or assistance, and perhaps being in formal nursing or residential care, you are happy to monitor the situation for now as Emily is well settled at home and moving elsewhere would be an upheaval for her. You are also sympathetic to the son's situation in terms of the impact that selling the house would have on him, but encourage him to keep in contact and let you know if there are any problems.

### Questions

Why do you think the GP was keen to maintain a good level of communication with Emily's son about the situation?

What challenges does it present when the son, as attorney, does not want to pay for formal care?