

What's the Best Option...Assisted Living OR In-Home Care?

Many children reach a point where they have to decide how to provide more services for aging parents, and often that involves a comparison of receiving in-home care or moving to an assisted living community. When it comes time for you to make that decision, it's important to have the facts.

How to Choose Assisted Living or In-Home Care

Understanding what Assisted Living is

Most seniors will say they want to stay in their own homes rather than make a move. But one thing we've learned after talking with thousands of seniors and their families is that most people really don't understand what assisted living is. For many seniors, assisted living conjures up a nursing home or "old folks" home of the past, because that's where they visited their loved ones years ago. And many children don't understand the extent of services that can be provided in assisted living or the benefits that come from having a loved one live in a community setting.

Isolation

One of the things we see most often is that seniors living at home alone, are isolated. These seniors equate living in their own home with independence, but they often don't realize the many adjustments they've made to stay there. If they no longer drive, they are now dependent on family or friends for all their trips. They can only go to church if someone takes them, can only play bridge if someone picks them up, can only get to the grocery store when family or friends go. And they are alone a lot of the time, with only the television for company. Without friends to talk with, without physical activity, without creative stimulation, they often become depressed.

A study conducted by the Mayo Clinic Study of Aging (and reported by CNN)¹ finds that maintaining an active social life appears to delay memory loss as we age. Social isolation may be an important risk factor for cognitive decline. And a study from the Ontario Brain Institute² reveals that, increasing activity could prevent one out of seven cases of Alzheimer's disease. The research found that individuals engaging in light exercise for as little as 30 minutes a day can lower the risk of developing Alzheimer's. Seniors living alone rarely have either the suggested social stimulation or physical activity to keep them healthy.

Benefits of In-Home Care

There is an important role for in-home care in the range of senior services. Home care is great for a short term need or one that is easily scheduled. It is valuable for someone returning from a hospital or a stay in a rehabilitation center who needs assistance for a short period of time. It can work well when a loved one has a care need that follows a consistent schedule, such as a bath several times a week. An aide can come and provide that service on a scheduled basis. In-home care can also be helpful when family members are providing most of the support to an older adult and need a break. Again, the specific care needs can be identified, and a caregiver can be scheduled to perform the tasks.

Benefits of Assisted Living

Many people think that in-home care will be the most cost effective way to provide the services a senior may need. They think, we'll only need to bring someone in for a few hours. But one of the challenges of relying on in-home care is that needs

do not always arise when a caregiver is in the home. Older adults have good days when everything goes according to plan, and other days when they need more. A great advantage of assisted living is the ability of staff to flex to accommodate these changing needs.

Assisted living staff interacts with residents many times during the day and they learn individual routines. Staff knows when something is different, or when a change has occurred that may have more serious health implications, and they can act immediately. This is especially important for seniors with chronic conditions such as diabetes, congestive heart failure or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Seniors receiving in-home care will have to wait until the next scheduled visit before someone can assess changes in condition. In the meantime, responsibility falls back on family to address unanticipated care needs.

Another important distinction between in-home care and assisted living is the access to the many services that are part of a senior community. Transportation, housekeeping and laundry are all tasks that can be removed from a family's "to do" list because the community offers the services on-site. With in-home care, family not only needs to hire and manage the person who provides health related services such as bathing and dressing, but also anyone who might be added to pick up homemaker tasks. Convenience is a critical factor when calculating the true cost of either in-home care or assisted living.

Helping seniors truly live independently

In-home care keeps people at home, but it does not necessarily keep them independent. In fact, this is probably the greatest myth of in-home care. If your world usually consists of the rooms in your home, if your social life is limited to when others can visit, if you can only participate in activities when someone else is willing to take you along, your independence is fairly limited. One of the greatest benefits of assisted living is that a move actually helps many people become more independent by giving them numerous opportunities to engage in all that life has to offer: activities to keep them physically fit, socially engaged, and mentally sharp. And, they can choose when they want to engage, without depending on someone else, a much truer measure of independence than the address where they live.

When comparing in-home care and assisted living, please consider quality of life in any comparison. As studies have shown, your loved one's health may depend on it.

This article is a reprint of a blog posting by Adele Lund, Laureate Group's Director of Community and Business Relations

¹<http://www.cnn.com/2015/04/09/health/creativity-socializing-delay-dementia/index.html> (Accessed May 1, 2018)

²<http://blog.braininstitute.ca/walking-away-dementia/> (Accessed May 1, 2018)