

Memory Moment

Thinking about a Long-Term Care Home

By Shannon Nosbisch, CDP, DCS

One of the most difficult decisions that a spouse, son or daughter, or caregiver has to make is when to move their loved one to a long-term care home. After caring for their loved one in their home as long as possible with help from friends, family and in-home services, there may come a time that a long-term care home move should be made. This article gives you some thoughts that may help in determining if and/or when a move should be made.

Spouses, children and other family members sometime make a promise to “never” place their loved one in a “nursing home”. Unfortunately, sometimes it needs to happen. Not just for the caregiver’s sake, but also for the well-being of the person needing care.

Make sure that you talk to your loved one BEFORE you HAVE to make a decision. A decision that has to be made immediately, may not be the best decision. Find out what their wishes are, what financial plans have been made (long term care insurance, investments, etc.), and other considerations.

For myself, I have told my children (and I am putting it in writing) that if I would not be able to get out of bed, care for myself with help, and/or I don’t know them, move me to a long-term care facility and do not feel guilty! I don’t want to cause problems for them in their lives.

Here are some signs it may be time to find a care facility (Care.com):

Health and Medical issues

Your loved one has late stage Alzheimer’s or dementia. When a person is in the late stages of Alzheimer’s disease, feeding, changing, bathing and moving them may require access to medically-trained staff full-time.

Your loved one has other health conditions combined with dementia. People with dementia who also have other serious and difficult to manage health complications

– for example, uncontrolled diabetes or heart and lung issues – may benefit from nursing home care.

There are more frequent accidents and injuries at home. Falls and other injuries may signal that the person is becoming unsafe in their current home. This can have nothing to do with your vigilance and care; it may simply mean that it's time for 24/7 professional help. Wandering may be an issue, also. If accidents, injuries and wandering episodes are becoming more common, reassess the living situation that's in their best interest.

Caregiver Issues

An older spouse is having trouble managing the caregiving. Spouses may become too frail to cope with the physical demands of caregiving. Or they may have been diagnosed with their own serious illness. Even with help from family and friends, an older spouse or partner's health can decline more quickly if they're acting as a caregiver and have done so for many years.

An adult child is struggling with other responsibilities. Adult children may have many other responsibilities themselves, including their own children to care for, a full-time job, their marriage and their own health issues.

You are the only person able to care for your loved one. It usually takes at least two people to manage care of someone at the end of life, especially if they have dementia. If you are an older caregiver, providing all of the care yourself may take a toll on your health.

You are afraid for the health and safety of your loved one and feel incapable of caring for them anymore. If you can't go to the bathroom without worrying about their safety – that they'll wander off or turn on the stovetop gas – it may be time to consider alternative care options.

Your mental health is suffering. That includes feeling any of the following on a regular basis:

- *Denial about the disease and how it's affecting the person diagnosed
- *Anger at the person who is ill.
- *Social withdrawal from friends and activities that use to bring you pleasure.
- *Daily anxiety.

- *Depression.
- *Exhaustion.
- *Sleeplessness.
- *Irritability that triggers moodiness and negative actions.
- *An ongoing inability to concentrate.
- *Being unable to remember the last time you felt good.

Some research suggests that the psychological effects of caregiving are more intense than the physical effects.

You are unable to hold down work responsibilities. You can't sacrifice your job if it's how you are financing your loved one's care, not to mention providing for your own or your family's needs.

Deciding to place a spouse or partner in a long-term care facility or nursing home can be tough enough, but when adult children aren't on board, it can be even more challenging according to Marijke Vroomen Durning in a Next Avenue article. If this happens, invite the family in more to see the day-to-day life issues or let them care for their parent for a weekend or go away with both parents for a getaway. Most of the time, children get a clearer picture of how difficult caring for their parent actually is. If disagreements seem beyond resolving, a professional may be the next step. A family doctor, social worker or therapist who specializes in aging can help guide the family through different resources available.

I have read in online support groups that, when their loved one is placed in a long-term care home, that caregiver can go back to being a spouse, son or daughter, grandson or granddaughter or other family member instead of the overworked, sleep deprived "drill sergeant" to your loved one!! Your care can continue into their new living environment, too, by making sure your loved one has qualified, responsive aides, nursing care and is clean and comfortable.

Moving a loved one to a long-term care home is a very personal decision and there's no "right" time for everyone. It is about the ability and desire of the caregiver to give care and the needs of the person who needs care. Moving your loved one to a long-term care home is *not* a failure!

You promised to "take care" of your loved one. When you can no longer manage or your loved one needs more care than you can provide, you seek out the best long term care home for them. This is, in fact, taking care of them!

Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness (EAAA) is a volunteer-run, not-for-profit organization founded to provide education and support to all families, caregivers, and people with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia in Effingham County and the surrounding area. For more information about Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness, check out the website at www.effinghamalz.org. If you are a caregiver & have specific questions or situations you would like information on, please feel free to call Shannon Nosbisch at 217-663-0010 or Amy Sobrino at 618-363-8372.