

Things I have Learned About Senior Care!

Only one third of seniors think they will need long term care. Reality two thirds actually will. Most care will be paid out of pocket. Over 72% of those needing long term care must use their own funds. That's half of everyone in America. Medicare is projected to only cover 12% of the nation's long term care costs. Medicaid is projected to only cover 30% of the population.

One of the greatest concerns; 75% of families have not had a discussion regarding care options. It has been said those who are not prepared get their care chosen by someone else and it won't be what you hoped for. If you are prepared you can choose the care you receive. Being prepared is the exception and not the rule here in America.

Why are we so unprepared? Could it be denial over aging? Are we over optimistic in our youth-oriented culture? Is the reality of aging not enough of a motivator until it hits closer to home? Is it because many of us connect long term care to end of life and many of us would prefer to not talk about it? We all think we are still young in our minds and postpone reality. In other words we think we can do hula hoops forever.

Money is the biggest issue. The seniors in the worst place are those *"too poor to be rich and too rich to be poor"*. In other words, the largest growing segment don't have enough money to pay for long term care out-of-pocket, but have too much to qualify for Medicaid. Options for this middle income segment are limited, desired and affordable quality life options are not readily available for this group.

Majority of seniors and there families do not understand the current rules of Medicare and Medicaid. They are government insurance programs but have stringent rules regarding coverage. Truth Medicare and Medicaid are sick and can't handle the in coming numbers of seniors needing their funding. There are 76 million baby boomers. They are turning 65 at the rate of 10,000 per day for the next 30 years. This is an unheard of demographic population shift. Most everyone is unprepared for the winds of this storm.

Many are shocked when they go to use it and find out that "in home care", unlike health care, is not covered by Medicaid. This is an out of pocket expense. Medicaid doesn't kick in until all personal assets are depleted. These programs are not designed to safeguard or protect you and your families assets. Even if it is only a few thousand in the bank and a very modest home. They are designed as a last stop resource.

It has been quoted, "Social Security won't save us, our kids won't house us, and our savings won't cover us. Financial Investment firms will continue to show the brilliant days of retirement walking on a beach with someone we love. They will not show the 85 year old languishing in a skilled nursing bed needing \$8500 a month just to survive."

This topic is scary. Many baby boomer parents have had experience with their own parents in rest homes and remember their own concerns of care. "People will always struggle with the issues that force them against their will to except long term care. It's like trying to prepare someone to take a hammer and smash their thumb. No matter how much you prepare, it's still going to really hurt."

Knowledge is power. Go on a senior care "walk about". Seek input and advice. Look for new technologies and housing options. Have consistent talks with your family. Avoid those last minute, "one and done" scenarios. Go slow, gather and digest options that you can afford and focus on them and begin planning. Don't wait for a crisis to force your hand! Desired options may not be readily available if you do. You are only setting yourself up to much frustration, stress and anger. It is important that family members under 50 years in age take heed and begin planning their own long term care strategies while you can still affect you and your families own futures. Don't wait. Put this reality

on your radar screen. We never know when dementia or a stroke could suddenly strike and turn your families life upside down requiring someone long term care. These financial consequences can be truly devastating for the remaining spouse and their family. Seven in ten older Americans will need long term care and 20% of them will be five years or longer.

Family involvement going forward is the greatest key. There will have to be culture shifts back to where we once were here in America. Many other countries still practice this because of these very funding issues. Our culture shifted from one where we aged together, with several generations living under one roof to one now where we are segregated from our families. As a culture I believe we have to take back the responsibility for ourselves and our family members there not many choices. Caring for the aged and those disabled can no longer be pushed on to others or the government. The government is broke they are looking to cut 76% of rest home payments as we speak in the current health care debates.

Discussing this early can help reduce sibling arguments and the tearing of families apart. This is an emotional issue and can cause great strains on families in energy, time, money, and relationships. This tsunami will be devastating for some seniors and their families. They will have to choose substandard housing, they will find themselves choosing between buying medicines, food and other services. Others will be forced into bankruptcy and share in housing to support for someone they love. The range of effects of people not being prepared is far reaching. This isn't a third world issue. It is and will be seen and felt in every community in our great country going forward.

We are living longer, our nest eggs or social security were never designed to carry us through in a time where health care has seen double digit increases every year. It is unrealistic to think we won't need help in our lives and it shouldn't be shock when it comes. More than 70% of people living past 65 will require some level of long term care. It is less known fact that 41% of the population under 65 will need similar long term services. People need long term care all around us – but we still have a hard time imagining that we could be one of the 41% of working age adults that need long term care. When we see Bill, a 54 year old leaning against a walker, we immediately think knee surgery. We don't think stroke! Most are shocked to learn one third of 700,000 stroke victims each year are under the age of 60.

When we see La Von, we see a kind woman down the street being cared for by her husband because she has dementia. 5.2 million Americans had Alzheimer in 2014 alone.

Ignorance and denial should not be or will it ever be a winning health care or aging strategy. No one truly cares like you need to care it is our responsibility to care! Parents of all children regardless of your age try to understand the potential burden you may place on your offspring. Try to realize this before it is too late to effect needed change. This senior problem is everyone in the family's problem.

There is already a shortage of care home beds and the projections of even greater shortages as baby boomers begin to fill them. How will the care needs of all of our citizens be met? It has been said, the best and most healthy way to age is in one's own home. This may not be possible so home like alternatives with family members should be sought! Family members will find themselves being put into the care giver role, and in many cases paying out of their own pockets for their family member's care. Family members all need to help in these situations. Don't leave it to the family member that it is assumed they have more than the rest. It is everyone's responsibility to help no matter how little ones financial or in-kind labor support is. Practice the type of care you want others to care for you!

We need to be on the lookout for new options with better more affordable living arrangements. Ones that are more efficient, those that provide a safe environment and high quality care and health. As well give families the tools to provide the "in kind labor" and provide a higher level of day to day care without the high costs. The 900,000 older adults currently living in assisted living centers came from their homes because 72% needed help in bathing, 52% need help dressing, 36% needed help toileting,

and 81% needed help managing their daily medications. These are basic fundamental tasks that families provide in many countries around the world. We will need to do it here as well.

We look at the great-smiling faces in the senior care brochures. The activities and all the social action they market. We marvel at the timber beam architecture and the amenities, wishing we could live in a country club environment. We drop mom off, hoping, believing, the fantasy that these marketing departments have created. On the way to the door, realism hits as we see the far-away stare from an aging woman, someone's mother, parked in the hall in her wheelchair. Our senses are quickly heightened and we notice things like the dank smell of urine and the food stains from lunch on her mouth and clothing. We hear her faint cry, please take me home. Her plead sinks deep into your bones. Your mind begins to question your own decisions. Reality sets in and we begin to question what is really best for our seniors. What are the new roles of family members in this ever changing and seemingly unfair world?

As seniors they have taken great pride in caring for themselves over these last 60-80 years. They carried the torch for their families this whole time. The very thought of being dependent on other's clashes with their years of independence. Nothing is more personal than caring for your own bodies. Many struggle in losing control over something so fundamental and private. Their modest retirement savings, and homes and their ability to leave a small inheritance to loved ones is dashed. These life long acquisitions quickly becoming earmarked for items never before considered like medical expenses and assisted living. The feeling of being a burden now floods their mind. They are now helpless in a world they once ruled. They now watch their standard of living beginning to slip out of their control. Is it not our turn to carry the torch on their behalf?

We live in a culture today where most live for the moment. Many of these seniors were hard working savers, planning with the government programs that at the time worked. Only to reach this period today where these programs can no longer deliver due to enormous health care increases, living longer and the sheer numbers retiring. Family members today now determine their seniors standard of living – choose well. The aging population and long term care is a silent national crisis that needs to be heard! We can no longer kick this can down the road. We soon will all have to drink from this very can! Are you willing to live as your seniors have to? It is too late to wait and start this discussion after people are old and suffering. For senior preparedness is a life long process with many uncertainties intertwined. “If you and your family are prepared you can reduce many fears.”

Compiled by Mark Hunter September 2017, Living Solutions, LLC.

Sources: www.seniorcare.com,
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