

Kathy Key, Community Relations Director, The Emeritus at the Medallion, Dallas (Assisted Living) for the Accountable Aging Care Management September 2011 Newsletter

1. When is the ideal time to move from living in one's own home to living in an assisted living facility?

When we were children, our mothers knew how we were to progress through the first year until age 5. They had Dr. Spock's book telling them what to expect. The aging older adult does not come with a manual. Every person, every individual is just that, individual and unique as far as a timeline goes. The ideal time to move from one's home would be before a crisis has occurred and it becomes a necessity to make a move, rather than an anticipated event. I think the most important aspect of deciding when it is time is safety. Safety touches all issues concerning older adults. For example: are they having frequent falls, forgetting medications, not eating properly, fearful of being alone and isolated, opening the door to strangers and not properly maintaining their environment? From a safety standpoint, it would be ideal to move sooner than later, but unfortunately this doesn't consistently happen.

2. In making the choice to move to a facility, what are the three most important factors that a family should consider?

One thing to consider when looking at facilities is to look at the amenities through the family member's eyes and not yours. So often, a perfect facility for Mom according to the daughter is not at all what would be comfortable to Mom. If she is an avid bridge player, find out if the bridge games are weekly or monthly. It might make a difference for her and her comfort level. If she has beginning Alzheimer's disease, is there a licensed unit so she can age in place versus having to find another facility later? You may also want to observe how the staff relates to her: welcoming, friendly and concerned? What is the family's comfort level with the staff, as well?

3. Once a person moves into a facility, what are some of the ways in which the family members can help make this transition easier?

If this is truly the right fit for your family member, the staff at the facility are tuned in to what he/she will need as far as care, engaging in activities and the dining experience. The family can make a big impact by throwing a small party for the "new" resident and some of their old neighbors or friends. This would be held at the facility the week they move in. This gives their friends information so that they can stay in touch and connected to their old friend. The family is responsible for moving in the furniture, but it is very important that the family member help make decisions on which pieces they want to bring. It is so comforting to have those familiar pieces around. Favorite items from treasured collections, scrapbooks and picture albums are a

must. These items not only keep everyone connected, but also serve as an item with “bragging rights” as new friends are cultivated.

4. In working with families that have waited too long, what do you see as the primary causes?

The one major cause that I see for waiting too long is communication. It is not always easy to communicate about important issues with an older adult. On one hand, you are trying to get information that has usually not been shared before. On the other hand, you are trying to respect this person’s privacy and role in your life. Sometimes these barriers have to be overcome for the safety of the family member involved. At the Assisted Living level, the family is probably already joining their loved one on doctor’s appointments and helping with transportation. The conversations have now changed in dynamic and must include more in-depth issues like money and care. One company has even publicized that you need to have the important conversations at least by the time they are age 80 to help with proper planning for the future. I can’t stress enough how important communication is to the safety and wellbeing of older adults. Take the time, ahead of time, for proper planning, comfort and safety.

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