

# A Nursing Home – When is it time?



The Queensway Carleton Hospital  
Social Work Department

## **Considerations for Family Caregivers**

You may be wondering about the need to move an elderly spouse, relative or friend to a Long Term Care Facility (formerly called nursing homes or homes for the aged). There rarely is a quick and easy solution to the timing for such an important decision.

The questions in this pamphlet may help you to make a decision. If you are having difficulty in dealing with only a few of these problem areas, a range of community services is available to help.

If you respond with a “yes” to several areas of concern we suggest that you contact your family physician or any of the agencies listed on the back page. Professionals can help you to determine if it is, indeed, time to consider a long term care facility.

## Mental or Memory Concerns

- ❖ Is he refusing to accept outside services, demonstrating poor insight into risks?
- ❖ Are loss of memory and judgment in the home creating dangerous situations (e.g. pots are left to burn on the stove, keeps/eats food that has gone bad)?
- ❖ Has he wandered away and been unable to find his way home?
- ❖ Are there changes in his personality or behavior that are creating a need for others to become involved (e.g. a formerly outgoing person refuses to leave his apartment because he is becoming suspicious of others)?
- ❖ Do you notice deterioration in personal or household cleanliness?
- ❖ Is there a danger that he will harm or will be harmed by others in the household?

- ❖ Has he had a long-standing psychiatric disorder that is becoming more difficult to manage?
- ❖ Is he easily influenced by others and at risk of being taken advantage of financially?
- ❖ Is he mixing up finances (e.g. pays the same bill 3 times, forgets to deposit cheques)?

#### Physical or Medical Concerns

- ❖ Has she had a number of falls or “close calls” lately?
- ❖ Does she have difficulty walking, climbing stairs, or getting in/out of chairs or the bathtub?
- ❖ Is she having accidents with loss of bladder or bowel control?
- ❖ Does she mix up or forget to take her medications?
- ❖ Does she struggle with her regular medical regimes (e.g. injections, dressing changes, colostomy care, or diet restrictions)?
- ❖ Is she making frequent calls for urgent help to friends, neighbors, relatives, service providers and even strangers?
- ❖ Is she making more frequent visits to a physician or hospital emergency department with a variety of health complaints?

#### Social Concerns

- ❖ Is she spending more time alone in her home?
- ❖ Is her house unsafe (e.g. poorly heated, isolated, a fire trap)?
- ❖ Is her house inappropriate for her needs (e.g. stairs are difficult to climb, the home cannot accommodate a wheelchair)?
- ❖ Is she unhappy with her living arrangements?
- ❖ Has she made repeated requests for people to stay with her because she is afraid of being alone?
- ❖ Is she financially unable to hire in-home help?
- ❖ Do you suspect alcohol abuse or medication over use?

#### Caregiver Concerns

- ❖ Do you have your own health problems that now are interfering with your ability to look after someone else?
- ❖ Are you frequently awakened in the night by calls for assistance?
- ❖ Is the time and energy spent in looking after him forcing you to give up many activities you once enjoyed?
- ❖ Are demands on your time putting a strain on your family life and job responsibilities?
- ❖ Do you find you need to take unscheduled hours away from work to provide care?
- ❖ Are there few (if any) others to share the responsibilities?
- ❖ Are quick and convenient visits impossible because you live some distance apart?
- ❖ Do you feel overwhelmed by his care needs and don't know how long you can continue?
- ❖ Do you find that you are more short -tempered and fear that you may even lash out in anger because you are feeling the stress of responding to his increasing needs?
- ❖ Is the cost involved in keeping him at home more than you can readily afford?

## **Conclusion**

When the strain of caring for elderly family members in the home finally becomes overwhelming, a long term care facility may be the only answer. There is no magic formula to deal with the emotional turmoil which a family will face when it comes time for placement.

You may experience feelings of grief due to the loss of health of your spouse, parent, sibling or friend who now needs a long term care facility. You may also be struggling with feelings of guilt that you can no longer meet their needs. You should keep in mind that placement provides increased security and peer companionship for impaired adults.

“The proportion of seniors who live in residential care facilities increases with age. While less than 1% of the population between the ages of 65 and 74 years are in residential care facilities, this percentage climbs to 20% for persons aged 85 years and older.” (*Statistics Canada, Residential Care Facilities 2003/2004*). Long term care facilities have the technical resources and the professional staff to preserve the senior’s quality of life when round the clock care is required.

The problems of caring for frail elderly people at home don’t go away – they usually become more arduous with time. Planning ahead (before the burden of care reaches a crisis) allows families to choose when and where their senior members will be placed. When all else has been tried, placement may be the most responsible decision that you can make.

## **Where to go for help**

Family physicians can make referrals to the Community Care Access Centre (for in-home services and/or long term care placement) and other community services.

Professionals will also help with financial issues when one spouse needs to move to a long term care home. Subsidies are available for low income seniors.

In Ontario, look in your telephone book for the following:

- Community Care Access Centre
- Community Information Services
- Council on Aging
- Or talk to a hospital social worker or the hospital discharge planning department.