



Winter 2004

Keeping In Touch

News For Family Caregivers

by Lynn Cibuzar, LSW, DARTS Service Coordinator

For Your Information

Choosing Assisted Living: What Do I Need to Know?

If you are thinking of a move to assisted living for yourself or a family member, what are the most important questions to ask? How do you choose from the many options available? Although it's best to think about your own needs and preferences and develop your own questions, below are some key concerns for making an informed decision on assisted living.

Rent and other fees

- What is the rent or monthly fee?
- How often does the rent increase? What have the increases been over the past two years?
- How much notice will I get before the rent or other fees goes up?
- What services are included in the rent or monthly fee? If my need for services stays about the same, how much should I expect to pay next year toward rent or monthly fees?
- What services cost an additional amount, and what are those fees?
- What other costs besides the rent or fees should I plan on?
- What payment types are accepted? Private insurance? Medicaid? Medicare? Group Residential Housing? Other? Can my family help pay for my services?

(continued on back)

Blessed Are Those Who Hear

When illness arrives, people surround us to show they care. On the flipside, we are surrounded by other people confronting illness, and we may have been unaware until now.

Illness brings us together, but it can also move us apart.

If we are lucky, we have friends who are helpful and reassuring. They say just the right thing. We look to them to calm our fears and lessen our anxieties.

Other friends stay away and we wonder why. Perhaps they don't have the energy, compassion, or strength to support an ill person or a caregiver through a life-altering journey.

We need to share our story with others to gain their support. By educating someone on what it is like to be ill or a caregiver, we gain an ally. Early on we learn who is a good support person. Some people deplete our energies. Others give us pity, advice, and false reassurances.

Who are the empowering supporters? They listen and nurture without changing the subject when it gets uncomfortable. They sit through being uncomfortable because we need them. They are flexible and patient as we wonder and guess what the future holds. They offer rather than wait to be asked. They encourage us. They are truthful and tactful. They help clarify our problems, but are open to talking about other things. They see us as more than the illness. We feel their presence even when they're not there.

May we always have a multitude of listeners.

***We can endure any tragedy as long as we
have someone to tell the story to.***

– Garrison Keillor

(continued from front)

- If meals are included in the rent, do I have to pay for meals that I don't eat?
- Do I have to pay for rent or services for times that I'm away; for example, out of town or in a hospital or nursing home?
- What happens if I run out of money?

Services available

- What is the meal plan? Is there a choice of menu items? Can my family join me for a meal? What is the cost?
- Who decides what services I need? What if I disagree? Can I refuse to take services you think I should have? What if I can't pay for these services?
- Can I include a family member in discussions about my services? Will you have regular meetings with my family and me about the services I need?
- Who decides when my services will be scheduled? What if I want to make a change in the schedule?
- What types of staff provide these services? What training is provided to staff? Who supervises the staff and how often?
- Are caregivers in the building round-the-clock? Can I get help any time, day or night? How do I call for help?
- Are there services I might need that you don't provide? Can I hire someone else to provide these services?
- Do you provide special services for someone with memory loss?
- Do you serve people who wander or have behavior problems? How do you handle these problems?

Moving out

- If I decide to move out (for example, to another assisted-living facility or to a nursing home), how much notice do I have to give?
- If I have to go to the hospital or a nursing home for a while, can my room be held for me?
- Can you ask me to move out? Why would you ask someone to move out?
- If I need to move, does anyone help me find a new place to live? How much time will I have to make these arrangements?

Other questions

- Who can help me if I have a problem or complaint? What if I'm not satisfied with the response?
- If I have to share a room, who picks my roommate? What if we don't get along? What if I need some privacy for family visits or when I'm receiving services?

You should be able to find answers to most of these questions in the assisted-living provider's housing-with-services contract, lease, or other written documents. Be sure to ask to see these materials and review them with the provider.

Source: Minnesota Health & Housing Alliance

May We Help You?

Where does a caregiver turn when they need help caring for their loved one, but can't afford to hire help? One option is the **Alternative Care Program** – it's for people over 65 who want to stay in their own home and who have certain income and asset limitations. To qualify, the asset guidelines are fairly liberal – less than \$25,000 for a single person and less than \$49,000 for a couple (not including the house). The eligible person may be asked to pay a portion of the care costs depending on their financial situation.

The program, administered by Dakota County, can pay for a variety of services and products, such as respite care, adult day care, home health care, Meals on Wheels, nursing visits, medical supplies, incontinence products, and homemaking/chore services.

For more information about the Alternative Care Program, call Dakota County Public Health Nursing at **651-554-6115**.