

After Assisted Living, What's Next?

While most people who move to assisted living community will not need to move from the community they initially moved to, some residents' needs exceed the services the community can offer.

There are a few common reasons people leave assisted living to go on to another type of care setting:

- First, memory loss or unstable medical condition such as pneumonia or stroke;
- Second, an inability to navigate the hallways due to mobility issues;
- Third, some develop care needs with require a higher acuity of care and services.

What is the next step if that occurs?

Options offering higher levels of care are:

- **Adult Family Home:** This may be an excellent option for someone who is becoming frail in body or mind. These private homes are licensed to care up to five people (six in Washington). There is a large selection of homes in type, ambiance, skill level and activities. Some homes are quite elegant and comfortable. Some are modest and cozy. Social activities are limited compared to an assisted living but there is a great deal of individualized care and attention given to each resident.
- **Secured Dementia Community:** While it is said that no two cases of Alzheimer's is the same. Many residents with Advanced Alzheimer's disease will become disoriented to time and place; they may become agitated easily or forgetful. They may wander out or confuse day for night. A secured dementia care community will have the trained specialists crucial for the success of a resident with these concerns. The exit doors are monitored or alarmed. There are special activities that don't require short term memory. Activities of daily living are provided for. The buildings are designed with special adaptive features such as special lighting and walkways, to make life easier and safer for the residents.
- **Skilled Nursing Facility:** A highly medical or hospital-like environment with registered nurses on site twenty four hours. A resident may have nursing care-type needs requiring the diligent attention of a medical professional; or the person may require treatments or therapies only available from licensed health care staff. Skilled Nursing Facilities have designated Medicare beds that are reserved for those who are rehabilitating from strokes, heart attacks or fractures. There is usually a long term care section where patients are living out there lives while

receiving skilled nursing care. Nursing homes do have dining and activity rooms, activity programs and the benefit of Social Services on site.

How will you know if your loved one needs to take the next step?

Often the assisted living community staff will bring it up if they begin to notice a decline. Additionally, they will let you know if a health crisis like a stroke or heart attack occurs makes it impossible to return to assisted living from the hospital.

It may not be clear to you as to why a move is needed. If you are asked to move, make sure to ask a lot of questions. The resident's best interest and healthcare needs are the most important. Communities do not like to lose residents and they will do whatever it takes, within reason, to accommodate the health care needs of your family member.

Supporting a family member faced with this move is crucial. A change in setting is not easy. Be gentle when preparing your loved one for another move. Being an advocate and working closely with the staff in each place will make for a smoother transition. We would all like to "age in place," but sometimes it is not the best decision or simply not possible.