

# Decision Time

BY JESSICA A. PAVELKO

The holiday decorations have been taken down, family members have returned to their hometowns and the kids are back in school. Our hectic schedules have finally started to wind down. Or have they? Although you would love to sit back with a cup of tea and relax, you just can't get your parents' welfare out of your mind.

Sound familiar? In an effort to help caretakers make the best decisions regarding their parents' welfare, I'll be contributing to the magazine on a regular basis. Look for my future columns, including: "Using Your Five Senses When Touring a Community," "Services that Encourage Individuals to Remain at Home as Long as Possible" and more. If you have any topics that you would like to learn more about, please contact [info@pavelko.org](mailto:info@pavelko.org) with your suggestions.

"They certainly are adamant about living the rest of their lives at that house," you tell yourself, remembering the spirited conversation you had with your parents during their holiday visit. Then, your mind begins to race. Can they really keep up with the housework? What happens this winter when it snows and they need to travel somewhere or simply walk to the end of the driveway to pick up the newspaper? The last thing you need is for one of them to slip and fall on the ice. Between your job, taking the kids to basketball practice or piano lessons, trying to prepare a nice dinner on a nightly basis and tackling the ever-growing piles of laundry, you simply don't have time to stop by and check on them each and every day.

Obviously, you're unsure whether staying at home is in your parents' best interest. Granted, home is where the heart is and we all associate "home" with a lifetime of memories. On the other hand, the argument against staying put begins with their driving abilities. (You are already trying to convince Mom and Dad that they need to give up driving.) The question is, how are they going to take care of getting to medical appointments or the grocery store should they remain in their home? In your heart, you know you can't be available on an around-the-clock basis.

The second issue involves home

maintenance. Are your parents really going to be able to continue to do everything around the house, like changing light bulbs, taking out the trash, keeping up with maintenance and going up and down the stairs to do the laundry?

If only you could gain some peace of mind by understanding the options that are available to your parents. While remaining at the house is their first choice, other options – namely, retirement communities – should be explored. However, like a lot of people who are dealing with the same dilemma, you are unsure of where to start. After all, there are more than 60 retirement communities in Lancaster County and you don't have time to flip through the yellow pages and call all 60, let alone look at each and every one of them.

The first step is gaining an understanding of their differences. First and foremost, you need to consider what type of community is best suited to meeting the needs of your parents: a Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC), an Assisted Living/Personal Care Facility, a Skilled Nursing Facility or a Dementia/Alzheimer's Care Facility. This decision will ensure that your parents will receive the level of care they require in a setting they will appreciate.

## Continuing Care Retirement Community

CCRCs, which account for the largest number of communities in Lancaster County, provide a variety of accommodations – everything from two-bedroom villas to semi-private rooms. The type of accommodation will ultimately be determined by the individual's level of care.

These communities also provide a continuum of care including independent living, assisted living, nursing care, Alzheimer's care and rehabilitative services. CCRCs, which have a board of directors, operate under a strong set of values and principles.

## Assisted Living/Personal Care

These facilities most commonly provide a "home-like setting" for residents. They also provide 24-hour supervision; however, they encourage residents to be as independent as possible.

Assistance with Independent Activities of Daily Living (IADLs) and Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) are provided on an as-needed basis. The services provided include laundry,

housekeeping, three daily meals, transportation and scheduled activities. Daily assistance includes dressing, bathing, grooming and more.

Most of these communities have approximately three levels of care, which are based on the individual's need for assistance. In the event that the resident needs skilled nursing or Alzheimer's care, most Assisted Living/Personal Care facilities will assist the family in making a transition to another facility that is able to provide a higher level of care.

## Skilled Nursing

Such facilities provide health services 24 hours a day for individuals who require full-time care or supervision. These facilities often offer rehabilitative or short-term services for an individual who needs therapeutic care after a hospital stay. Registered Nurses (RN), as well as Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN), oversee the care of residents. Alzheimer's care is most commonly provided through Assisted Living or Skilled Nursing facilities. This level of care is often situated in another section of an existing community/facility and is a locked unit for the purposes of preventing an individual from wandering. The staff is well-trained to work with those individuals who may be experiencing memory loss and agitation.

You can expect to find activities and additional amenities that promote independence – and increase quality of life – in any of these levels of care.

While the idea of a transition may seem difficult for your parents to accept, many individuals actually find more enjoyment in life as a result of having to spend less time taking care of household tasks. Research has shown that once they successfully make the transition, they begin to enjoy an increased quality of life from a physical, social, spiritual and mental perspective. ♦



*Jessica A. Pavelko, a lifelong Lancaster resident and senior consulting specialist, launched Pavelko Senior Consulting Services, LLC (PSCS) in 2006. The business takes a unique personal and professional interest in seniors and their families by assisting them in making certain all of the resources are being utilized that best meet an individual's needs. PSCS acts as an advocate and navigator for seniors, and helps them and their family members make wise decisions regarding the care that they desire and deserve. For more information, contact PSCS at 717-517-8871, e-mail at [info@pavelko.org](mailto:info@pavelko.org) or visit [www.pavelko.org](http://www.pavelko.org).*