

Planning Ahead

You're trying to find all of Mom or Dad's important papers. You're touring communities and making endless phone calls to admissions coordinators only to learn they have waiting lists or your parent does not qualify financially. You feel as if you're in over your head and wonder if you will ever see the light at the end of the tunnel. Then, when you finally feel as if you've made some headway, you learn that one, two or even three more matters need your attention. The "to do" list and responsibilities seem never-ending. If only your parents would have planned ahead...

If you see yourself assuming caregiving responsibilities in the near future (or perhaps you want to start making some decisions for yourself), what follows are some suggestions on the steps that you can take now.

Place Your Name on a Waiting List

If you are considering any level of care (Independent Living, Personal Care, Skilled Nursing or Alzheimer's Care) for your parent within a retirement community, place his or her name on a waiting list *now*. In Lancaster County alone, there are approximately 15 Continuing Care Retirement Communities, as well as more than 40 other communities that offer Personal Care and/or Skilled Nursing. While some retirement communities have immediate availability, you will find that most of them have waiting lists, some as long as five years or more. Oftentimes, individuals find it beneficial to have a Geriatric Consultant involved in helping to narrow one's options.

There are several questions you should ask before looking into a retirement community. The first is: how long can you afford to wait? If the move needs to be made sooner rather than later, then it's a good idea to fill out applications for three to five com-

munities, as one may have availability before the others. In addition, it is always nice to have more than one community from which to choose.

The next questions involve the level of care you are looking for now and what level of care may you need down the road. Does the community you are interested in offer more than one level of care? In that vein, make sure the community has services that will accommodate you in the event that you need more assistance in the future. Lastly, and most importantly, tour the communities before filling out the applications.

Please refer to previous Caregiving 101 articles including: "Decision Time," "Using Your Five Senses," "How Are We Going to Pay" and others. These articles may be found at my website, www.pavelko.org/news.

Financial Planning

Will you qualify for all the retirement communities that interest you? Some retirement communities do not have any financial qualifications, while others will require proof that your parent will be able to privately pay for care for three years or more. This total will generally exceed \$200,000 per person.

While having your parent's name on a waiting list is beneficial, it is important to understand that there is no guaranteed acceptance of his or her application. As we know, the state of the economy can change drastically and one may lose a considerable amount of assets over a short period of time; such a sudden downturn could make an individual ineligible for some retirement communities.

Before making the transition, sit down (perhaps as a family) with a trusted financial planner to review your parent's current portfolio and assure that there is enough income generated and assets accrued to afford retirement community care.

Legal Documentation

As part of the admission process, most retirement communities require that residents have both a Power of Attorney for their financial and other affairs and an Advance Directive for medical care. In the event a resident becomes incapacitated, the retirement community wants to know who will be serving as the resident's agent under the Power of Attorney so that their financial affairs are properly handled. This includes the monthly payment and other fees associated with care received by a retirement community. According to Frank Chesters, Esq., a local estate-planning attorney with McNees, Wallace and Nurrick (291-1177), "Although you may not be currently contemplating admission, you should have a Power of Attorney prepared that appoints an individual or institution to have authority to handle your financial affairs. Even if you are married, there are many types of assets your spouse would be unable to access in a time of financial need such as retirement accounts, the cash value of a permanent life insurance policy, annuities or other investments titled solely in your name. In addition, if your spouse wanted to sell your jointly owned residence to downsize to a smaller, less costly residence or refinance your mortgage to access the equity, your spouse would need to be appointed as your agent under a validly executed Power of Attorney in order to consummate either of these transactions. In the absence of a Power of Attorney, a spouse or other family member would have to seek from the local court the appointment of a guardian of the principal's estate, which is both costly and less flexible in attending to the financial needs of the incapacitated person."

If a resident of a retirement community suffers an unexpected medical event, such as a stroke or heart

attack that renders them temporarily or permanently incapacitated, the community wants to have a responsible individual documented to consult with and implement necessary medical treatment. Mr. Chesters states, "Unlike a financial Power of Attorney, there are statutory provisions in Pennsylvania that provide a list of individuals by relationship to the incapacitated individual who would have the authority to make certain medical decisions for them if they have not signed an Advance Directive for Health Care. Nevertheless, the statutory list may not correspond with their wishes as to who should make medical decisions for them." In addition, by preparing an Advance Directive for Health Care, they are able to communicate to their family their personal wishes regarding the type and scope of medical care they desire.

Funeral Arrangements

Pre-planning and pre-paying funeral arrangements account for important and wise decisions, as they allow individuals to express their final wishes, as well as save money in the long run. According to Jacqueline Adamson, funeral director at Charles F. Snyder, Jr. Funeral Home and Chapel (560-5100), "The cost of a funeral usually doubles every 10 years."

When asked to explain the difference between establishing a Burial Reserve through a bank and setting up a Pre-Paid Account with a funeral home, Mrs. Adamson notes, "When one sets up a Burial Reserve at a bank, prices are not locked in at the funeral home and the account is not protected from inflation. There is the possibility of a delay in accessing one's funds when closing the account, because a death certificate must be presented. One cannot receive a death certificate until after the funeral; therefore, family members are often asked to pay some fees up-front. When setting up a Pre-Paid Account with a funeral home, the account helps to offset inflation and the funeral home will still provide

you with the services and merchandise selected without tapping into your loved one's assets. Because the account is protected from inflation, there are times when families/beneficiaries will receive money back."

As you can see, it's important to educate yourself and seek advice from a professional to learn how to plan ahead and take responsible action. By doing so, you, as a caregiver, will not be put in a position of making rash decisions. By planning ahead for yourself, your loved ones will not need to make difficult choices for you later. ❖

Jessica Pavelko will be partnering with Ambassador Advisors to present two seminars that address the topic of "Planning Ahead." The first will be held on March 18 at Hempfield United Methodist Church, 3050 Marietta Avenue (Oyster Point), beginning at 12 p.m. The second will be held on March 26 at the Lancaster General Health Campus (second floor), beginning at 6:30 p.m. The public is invited to attend. Contact Jessica at Jessica@pavelko.org or call 517-8871 with any questions you may have.



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 or visit www.pavelko.org.