

Making the Move – What to Consider

The woman calling was in a panic. She had moved her father into her home but after two weeks was completely frazzled about his behavior and what his needs were. He was up all night, slept all day and was insisting that she take him home. I could tell from the tone in her voice and what she was telling me that taking him home was precisely what she'd like to do...if she could. She went on to relay that the reason Dad was living with her was that his neighbors from his old neighborhood several hundred miles away had called her when Dad was found outside in the middle of the night unable to find his house where he'd lived for over 40 years. The daughter had received several of these calls over the past several months. She knew it was time to do something about it. She promptly flew to Dad's aid, packed him up, put the house on the market, and moved him home with her. It only took two days for her to realize Dad's needs were way beyond her understanding. It took her another 10 days to call for help. What should she do?

As adults age, they do so with a variety of aches, pains and chronic diseases. They adapt their routines to accommodate their disabilities. For instance, when night vision becomes a problem, they quit driving at night and run their errands during the day. As they need to, they hire help to clean the gutters, carry in the groceries and other physical activities that have become too difficult. Sometimes the adult children aren't aware that the help is in place. Other times, it is the adult child that arranges the help after visiting the elder and realizing how impossible it is to get all the tasks done.

However, when the problem with the elder is a memory issue, the problem and the solution are not as readily apparent. A short phone conversation or even a quick drop in visit may not alert the family that there is a problem. Often, if it is discussed at all the person may admit to being forgetful and then remind the family member of their age. "I'm entitled to be a little forgetful, don't you think?" the elder will query leaving the family member feeling guilty for even suggesting that there might be a problem. So it's no surprise that this daughter who lives a distance from her Dad and is only able to visit once or twice a year is caught off guard and feels the need to act immediately!

Of course hindsight is always great particularly when you realize you've made a mistake. In this daughter's case, she recognized the problem, was able to articulate the issues and knew she wasn't able to solve the problem without some help. It would have been better had she contacted a geriatric care manager before she moved Dad out of his home but unfortunately she did not. After talking with her for some time on that first phone call, she was so relieved that there could be a solution and there was someone to help her Dad and her sort it out even if it was after the fact. There are a number of issues to consider BEFORE the move when moving is a consideration for an older adult:

Before the move.

Why is the move necessary?

Is it because the elder is unsafe? Unable to afford the current living arrangements? Needs to be closer to family? Has no support system close by and cannot do daily tasks?

Is the elder willing to move?

Is this the family's decision or is the older adult truly wanting to move? The degree of success depends on the elder's willingness to leave his home.

Has there been a trial run?

If everyone agrees on the move, have the elder visit the home or the area where he is relocating to for one month. It's one thing to visit for a weekend. It's another to stay a month.

What is the person leaving behind?

Are there friends, neighbors and church community that have been part of his life for many years? Are there other family members who will no longer be able to see this person as often? Does this person have a special

relationship with his doctor? Will he have to leave a pet behind? A garden? Are there special pieces of furniture, pictures, memorabilia or their car that he cannot bring?

Is the person moving into an appropriate housing arrangement?

Has there been an evaluation of what this person's needs are now and in the future to make sure the housing setting addresses the individual's needs? For instance, are there stairs and the person can't do stairs anymore?

If this is happening due to a crisis, are you looking at the long term?

Can the person afford the housing? If moving in with a family member, can the family take care of the elder's needs on going? Will there be on going support for the caregiver(s)?

Are there legal issues that need to be resolved i.e., Durable Power of Attorney (DPOA) & Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare (DPOH)?

When the person moves, will the legal documents need to be reviewed and changed due to different family member responsibilities?

The Move Has Happened.

With the daughter and her Dad above, the move happened before any of this was addressed. She's called for help. Now what should happen? Here are some issues to consider:

What are Dad's day to day needs?

Does the daughter know at this point what Dad can do for himself? She may want to consider utilizing the professional skills of the geriatric care manager to complete a psychosocial assessment to determine Dad's abilities, needs, falls risk and memory deficits.

Is this a short term patch or a long term solution?

Is the daughter (or the family) in this for the long term or is this just until another housing option such as Assisted Living facility can be found? Short term placements can be difficult particularly when there are memory deficits.

If Dad is truly miserable and so is daughter, what is the solution?

It all depends on what Dad's needs are, what was left behind (Is returning home with help an option?), etc. Are his needs such they he needs lots of supervision and/or care? What can the family help with? Can Dad stay at the daughter's with help so he's safe and cared for AND daughter has some respite too?

What should the family do first?

Contact a geriatric care management professional in the daughter's geographical area who can help sort out immediate needs versus long term planning. Paying for a family meeting will be well worth the family's time and money to have help determining the best solution. Part of the meeting will be used to discuss the on going family role including siblings who are available to take on portions of the care responsibilities. The family may decide after the initial meeting to have the geriatric care manager complete a full assessment of the client's needs to help in planning further.

What will the geriatric care manager (gcm) be looking at?

In helping a family decide on care, the gcm will evaluate the needs of the client, the finances available to assist with his care, the support system including where he came from and where he is now, healthcare issues, current health insurance coverage, wishes of the client, wishes of the daughter, wishes of the family at-large, and long term goal for this elder. The GCM will also review community resources and additional entitlements available for this client.

Should Dad be part of the family meeting?

If the elder is competent enough to give input, understand the purpose, and be part of the family unit, he/she should be there. Otherwise, the initial visit can be held without the client present.

Are there legal or competency issues that need to be addressed?

If there are, the DPOA should be present at the meeting or be available by conference call. When formal placement is an issue, the client has to agree to the placement or the person with Durable Power of Attorney must be present to sign the contract agreement.

Are you wondering what happened with this daughter and her Dad? The daughter did indeed call a GCM who set up an initial home visit and met the elder. In talking with Dad with daughter present, Dad admitted he was glad to be closer to his daughter but felt he wanted more of his belongings from his old home. Although he definitely had memory issues, he was angry that she hadn't brought his old jacket that was still hanging by the

kitchen door. The care manager had the daughter begin a list and she returned to her Dad's house to get them. In the meantime, the care manager was able to link the daughter to some community resources including home care to help with Dad's day to day care including taking him out and showing him his new community including touring the Railroad Museum. Finally, the care manager encouraged the daughter to talk with her siblings who had encouraged the move to schedule regular phone calls to Dad along with some respite time for the daughter. It would have been easier if the planning had taken place first but it didn't. It can be more of a challenge to go in and help pick up the pieces but it can be done to everyone's satisfaction.

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