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The Pros and Cons of Moving

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Deciding to move is always a big decision but when age and poor health are factors, the move can be all the more difficult. Looking at alternative types of housing such as retirement homes, mobile home parks, assisted living or smaller board and care facilities and skilled nursing facilities (nursing homes) can completely overwhelm the older person and their family trying to decide what's appropriate, what they like, where they want to move to, how much it's going to cost, and whether to make the move or not.

There are national organizations that help with moves and in fact, several professional geriatric care management companies specialize in helping with moving issues. Senior Moves, Inc., Memphis, TN. In one such organization, Janine Willis, geriatric care manager feels that the more help the family can get from professional geriatric care managers, the more time the family will have "to provide emotional support to the senior, thus making the transition easier." She goes on to state that all too often these very important decisions must be made too quickly. Everyone who's involved becomes stressed and irritable. There's no time to grieve the losses such as leaving a home of 40 years, leaving the neighborhood, friends, church, loss of independence, etc. Consequently, it's not unusual for family conflicts to arise or get worse with the stresses of moving.

Research has shown that client self-determination is the most important predictor of satisfaction when an older person makes the decision to change living arrangements and move. Instead of waiting for a crisis, Ms. Willis recommends considering what kind of a move might be acceptable ahead of time instead of waiting for the crisis to occur. A person has then decided where they want to live, near whom, the type of housing, the approximate costs and can start addressing the ending of one kind of lifestyle before beginning the next phase.

When memory may already be a problem with an elder, moving can make it worse. James Grubman, PhD, a neuropsychologist states that a "geographic move undermines someone's coping and produces a level of confusion in the new environment that is unexpected." He feels that when a person is living in their home with a familiar routine, this helps to cover for the early dementia since the routine doesn't tax the brain. "During or after a move, an individual can suddenly show trouble learning the new

address, display sundowning at night, get lost in the new neighborhood, etc. This move probably has uncovered a growing background deficit in mental flexibility and new learning capacity.” When the family brings this new behavior to the attention to the physician, in many cases a new doctor unfamiliar with the patient, he may put it off to the stress of the move. If however, these deficits do not cease or drastically improve within a reasonable time, it may be necessary to evaluate for dementia.

If you’re considering a move for yourself or for a family member, Elder Options’ professional geriatric care managers can sit down with you and discuss the various types of housing, appropriate level of care through a complete psychosocial assessment, costs of housing, and make referrals to facilities in the area. For more information, call (800) 336-1709, (530) 626-6939, (530) 541-1812 or (916) 391-8083.