

Top Five Overlooked (but Important) Things when Considering Senior Living Options

When the time comes to move a loved one into a senior living community, the options can be overwhelming and, with so many choices, it can be difficult to determine exactly what you need and want. In this article, we will share five important things that are often overlooked or misunderstood when considering senior living options. With this knowledge, you can improve both the experience (it doesn't have to be stressful!) and the end result.

1. You are not alone

One of the first things families experience when evaluating a new home for their loved one is overwhelming emotion – guilt, fear, sadness and more. It's important to remember you are not alone! These feelings are perfectly normal and nearly every person going through this process experiences them. Luckily, there are resources that can help you navigate through and find confidence in the process:

- Placement or referral agencies can be a fantastic resource when you feel vulnerable and overwhelmed. Advisors know exactly what you need to do, the questions to ask, the steps to take and the ins and outs of the industry – and they are usually free to families. When you feel overwhelmed and lost, they can step in and guide the way. Likewise, they can take pressure off of family members if the senior is having a hard time with the prospect of moving. As a third party, agency advisors can help ease the burden on family and evaluate all options from an independent perspective.

- There are also resources within healthcare facilities, such as social workers, with extensive experience in dealing with such situations. They can recommend other resources, such as Senior Services in Washington state, support groups, helpful tips and more – all you have to do is ask.

Many families don't realize that while the process may be scary at first, the outcome of the move can be more positive than they ever imagined. More often than not, seniors ask, "Why didn't I do this sooner?"

Additionally, if your loved one is hesitant to move, it is important to remember that by acting before the situation becomes "crisis mode" (i.e. have to move due to health emergency), you are helping to control the process and increase

the chances of a positive outcome. Being proactive affords seniors and families more options and opportunities to find the right fit.

2. Know benefits and know them well

Most benefits packages, from Medicare to Veteran's programs, are very complex. It's important to educate yourself in the intricacies of the benefits plan to ensure your loved one is able to take advantage of every benefit they are entitled to. Unfortunately, there are many misconceptions and misunderstood processes within benefit plans. For example, many people are under the assumption they must have a hospital stay before they are entitled to receive home care through Medicare. That is not the case. Similarly, many people think once they've left a rehabilitation facility, if their situation worsens, they must go back through the hospital and rehabilitation process before they can access home care. Also not true. By knowing the ins and outs of a senior's benefits package, you can ensure they receive all they are entitled to.

Some helpful resources include the government Medicare website, Medicare.com, Veterans Benefits Administration, Military.com or private insurance websites and handbooks. Consume all information available – as the saying goes, 'knowledge is power!'

3. Family members narrow down choices

The initial tours of senior living communities can be quite overwhelming. Often you'll want to visit multiple places and will have to meet with many different people. This can be a difficult experience for a senior, particularly for those against the idea of moving. It's often best to allow adult children or other family members to conduct the first round of visits, then, once it has been narrowed down to two or three communities, bring the senior in for a low-stress tour. This allows the staff to become familiar with what your family is looking for, and allows family members to be comfortable with the community when they bring the senior for a second visit.

4. Make yourself at home

It's essential for families to visit communities multiple times to get a true feel

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for the environment. Some things to try:

- Visit at different times. This will allow you to get a sense for how residents spend their days, what different activities might be going on and more.

- Arrange a meal at the community so your loved one can socialize with other residents, see everyone out of their rooms and taste the food that is served.

- Keep an eye out for new things each time you visit. Is there a different activity going on each time? Are residents out and about more some days than others? Is staffing sufficient at all times?

By visiting several times before a move, you will gain a better sense of resident lifestyle and can make the transition easier for your loved one.

5. Safety is key

As you may know, not all senior living communities are created equal, and, while most are trustworthy and safe establishments, safety and security must still be a top priority with every community you consider. The first step in protecting yourself and your loved one? Research. So much can be discovered about a community, its history and its employees through simple research.

There are resources that can be used to ensure a community's safety. If you are using a placement agency, tap its expertise. Advisors within these organizations spend their time either in the field, talking with communities or working with families. They usually know significantly more about histories, reputations and the pros and cons than you can find out online. Some agencies also perform careful background checks on every community they recommend, including combing legal filings for any pending complaints or lawsuits, checking into the records of employees and visiting the communities multiple times to ensure every resident is treated safely and respectfully.

If you are using an agency, it's also important to know that its employees follow safety and security practices – if they aren't complying with the highest standards, how can they judge communities?

Some things every placement and referral agency should practice:

- All employees should have completed criminal background checks at time of employment.

- The agency should hold corporate and liability insurance.

- All advisors should have completed HIPAA training – other healthcare certifications are also desirable.

- Agencies should comply with all federal and state regulations pertaining to the industry.

- Advisors should show a commitment to the well-being of the senior and family.

- Advisors should personally tour with the family to be their advocates.

If you choose not to use the services of a referral agency, there are some resources you can use on your own. For example, families can access resources through DSHS. Even sites like Angie's List can be helpful, with reviews and referrals from other users in a dedicated "Elder Care" category.

Similarly, one of the most important resources a family can tap is first hand references. Do you know any families that have recently gone through the process? Can the community provide any references to contact? Speaking directly with someone who has gone through the process, experienced the move and visited their loved one there, can provide an unmatched perspective.

Yes, the process of selecting the next home for your loved one can be overwhelming, but it is important to remember you are not alone and there are resources that can be tapped to make the transition as smooth as possible. Whether you want to use services, or handle the process yourself, there are many ways to ensure the move is a happy, healthy and seamless experience. Always remember, while the process can be overwhelming at times, the results can be overwhelmingly positive!

Concierge Care Advisors strives to elevate the senior care and housing referral services industry through personalized attention and self-regulation. Headquartered in Seattle, the agency helps individuals and families identify the best senior housing, assisted living, in-home care and other senior living solutions, based on each individual's unique circumstance. Each Concierge Care Advisor is HIPAA and CCA certified and is among the Northwest's best-trained senior care and housing professionals. Unlike many referral services, the company's advisors personally know, visit and prequalify every recommended community. To learn more about Concierge Care Advisors' services, and how the company is helping establish industry regulations from the ground up, visit www.conciergecareadvisors.com.

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