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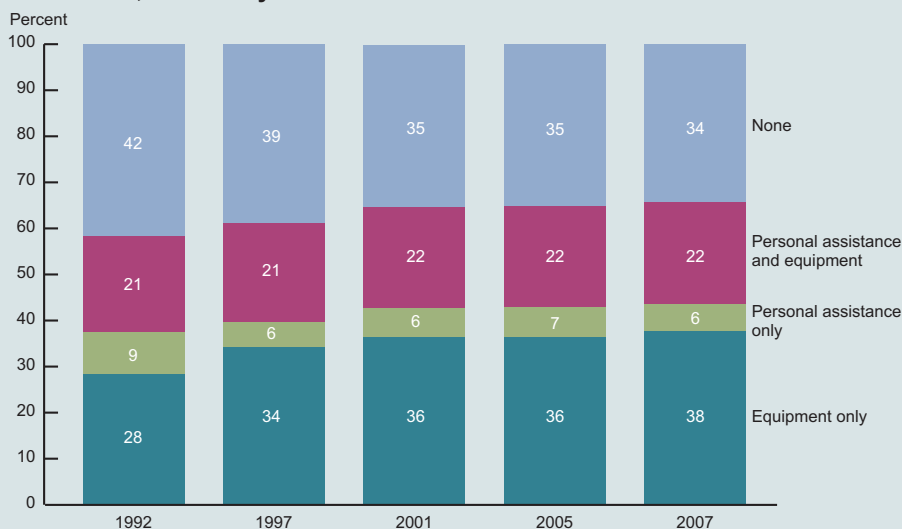


Helping Loved Ones Age Gracefully:

Developing a Plan

By Laurie Snyder

Percent distribution of noninstitutionalized Medicare enrollees age 65 and over who have limitations in activities of daily living (ADLs), by type of assistance, selected years 1992-2007



NOTE: ADL limitations refer to difficulty performing (or inability to perform for a health reason) one or more of the following tasks: bathing, dressing, eating, getting in/out of chairs, walking, or using the toilet. Respondents who report difficulty with an activity are subsequently asked about receiving help or supervision from another person with the activity and about using special equipment or aids. In this table, personal assistance does not include supervision. Reference population: These data refer to noninstitutionalized Medicare enrollees who have limitations with one or more ADLs. SOURCE: Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey.

Source: Federal Interagency Forum on Aging Related Statistics, "Older Americans 2010: Key Indicators of Well-Being" http://www.agingstats.gov/agingstatsdotnet/Main_Site/Data/2010_Documents/Docs/OA_2010.pdf

It happens to everyone at some point. Parents, once the invincible protectors of their children, grow old and become – “vincible.” Steps become harder to climb, memories aren’t quite as sharp, and bodies begin to wear down.

It is when witnessing one of those moments that 40- and 50-something children begin to realize that cherished, traditional roles are beginning to reverse. Parents resist, not wanting to face their possible decline. Children delay – out of denial or a sincere desire not to hurt their parents’ feelings.

But avoidance, while perfectly human, is the worst thing we can do as families and friends. In reality, we should be prepared not only to care for aging relatives, but for life in general, which has a habit of throwing curveballs even when we’re young. A 60-year-old golfer develops problems. A once-active sister who spent her life teaching physical education suddenly needs hip replacement surgery at age 58. Even one careless moment in a

car in your early 20s, and you’re Albert Brooks in the movie, “Defending Your Life.”

The National Institute on Aging advises Americans to begin thinking early and calmly about the inevitable. “Decide who will be responsible for which tasks. Many families find the best first step is to name a primary caregiver, even if one is not needed immediately. That way the primary caregiver can step in if there is a crisis.”

For those with aging parents with minor complaints who live close by, caregiving may be a hands-on experience or may involve the services of a homecare worker. For those with family far away, hiring a licensed professional geriatric care manager may be worth the expense to ensure peace of mind. The U.S. Administration on Aging’s Eldercare Locator (www.eldercare.gov) provides a search tool for qualified professionals.

Finding a physician trained in geriatrics is also critical. Many family doctors

may not realize that certain medications which work well for a 40-year-old can put elderly patients at risk for falls or altered thinking.

Then, stay engaged. A parent with burns or bruises may signal a problem, but so may withdrawal from daily interactions with friends. This could be a sign of depression – or of verbal mistreatment by a caregiver. Report suspected abuse immediately to the appropriate authorities, and contact your loved one’s physician for help.

And be prepared that, as a son or daughter, you may not be able to avoid sending a parent to a nursing home. A parent’s Alzheimer’s diagnosis or one’s own altered finances are unexpected, major game changers. Be realistic about how much you can do and what you are willing to do.

When you receive recommendations for long-term care facilities for your parent or grandparent, says Molly Jones, administrator of the Rheem Valley

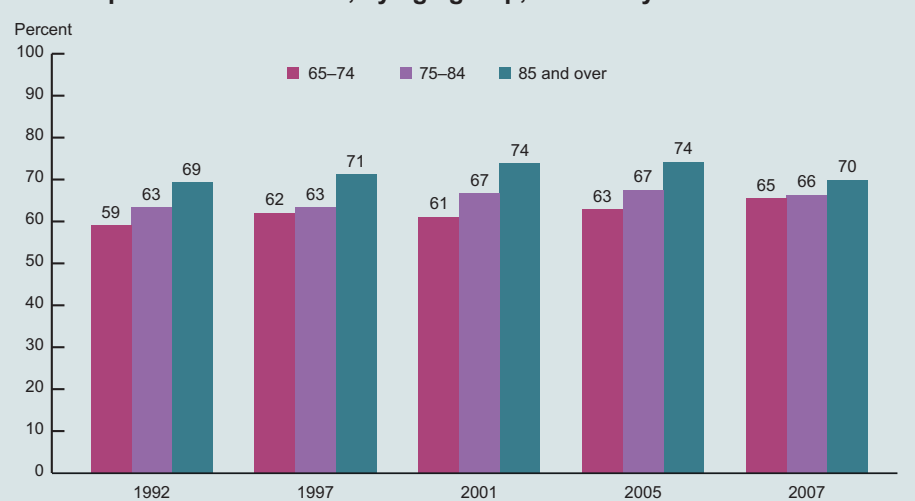
Convalescent Hospital in Moraga, pop in and tour each beforehand. Are staff passionate and committed? Is the facility clean? Do residents appear to be well cared for? What types of activities will be provided to keep residents at their baseline?

“The feel of the nursing home is so important,” muses Jones, whose own skilled facility won an award last year for its commitment to quality. She says it’s vital to get in and observe operations at different times of the day, and even encourages families to bring loved ones for lunch and to speak with current residents. “My building is small,” she says. “All the families know each other.”

And if you have a feeling that something is off, trust your gut. Don’t like a doctor’s bedside manner or decisions? Get a new doctor. Don’t like the quality of care? Work with your parent’s primary doctor to find a different facility. Families do have power.

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Percentage of noninstitutionalized Medicare enrollees age 65 and over who have limitations in instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs) and who receive personal assistance, by age group, selected years 1992-2007



NOTE: IADL limitations refer to difficulty performing (or inability to perform for a health reason) one or more of the following tasks: using the telephone, light housework, heavy housework, meal preparation, shopping, or managing money. Respondents who report difficulty with an activity are subsequently asked about receiving help from another person with the activity. In this table, personal assistance does not include supervision or special equipment. Reference population: These data refer to noninstitutionalized Medicare enrollees who have limitations with one or more IADLs. SOURCE: Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey.

Source: Federal Interagency Forum on Aging Related Statistics, "Older Americans 2010: Key Indicators of Well-Being" http://www.agingstats.gov/agingstatsdotnet/Main_Site/Data/2010_Documents/Docs/OA_2010.pdf



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Questions with senior care? Ask Vanessa

DEAR VANESSA,

I am starting to have some concerns with the actions and activities of my husband and I am hoping you could offer me some advice. We are both in our seventies, live a healthy lifestyle, and have a pretty good bill of health for our age. Lately I have been noticing some distressing things...my husband is starting to become much more forgetful than usual and is finding it increasingly difficult to remember normal everyday things such as picking up regular items from the store, taking his medication, and remembering events or social activities he looks forward to and enjoys that are habitual and occur on the same day every week. He also seems to be misplacing things much more often and forgets the location of places where we always visit. I am not a medical professional and do not know how to diagnose any conditions but it seems like these might be the beginning signs of Alzheimer's. I'm sure our doctor can run some kind of tests but I don't know much about this condition and I'm not sure what to do if that is the case and what options might be available to help him or us, especially if it becomes worse over time. I was hoping you could offer some advice. JOY

Love and support:
ingredients to
understanding
Alzheimer's.

Vanessa Valerio, RN
VP and COO for Patient Care
Home Care Orinda, (925-317-3080)
vanessav@careindeed.com

DEAR JOY,

Alzheimer's is a degenerative brain disease that causes a slow decline in memory, thinking and reasoning skills. Every individual may experience one or more of the following signs in different degrees: memory loss that disrupts daily life; challenges in planning or solving problems; difficulty completing familiar tasks at home, at work or at leisure; confusion with time or place; trouble understanding visual or spatial relationships; new problems with words in speaking or writing; misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps; decreased or poor judgment; withdrawal from work or social activities; and changes in mood and personality. It's important to remember, however, that these symptoms will most likely happen gradually rather than all at once. It is advisable to seek professional help if you notice any of these symptoms and if they are starting to interfere with your husband's life and yours.

Taking a hard look at Alzheimer's can be scary, but the better you understand this disease, the better you can respond to the needs of the person you love. Alzheimer's can cause substantial changes in how someone acts; understanding this fact will enable you to be more supportive and compassionate. Seeking support from other family members is very important at this time, too. Because Alzheimer's patients often have a tendency to withdraw from social interactions, keeping your husband mentally and socially stimulated, talking to him about things that interest him, and encouraging him to interact with people he knows can help. Redirect his thought process to something that he enjoys. Alzheimer's does not affect his five senses -- hearing, touch, smell, taste and sight. Introduce positive reinforcements that will stimulate these five senses. You cannot change an Alzheimer's patient's cognition but you can influence the way he feels which will affect the way he thinks. And the good news is the symptoms of Alzheimer's can be controlled and its progress can be delayed through love, support, patience and understanding.

A person diagnosed with Alzheimer's can have mixed emotions that can include confusion, frustration, anger, fear, uncertainty, grief and depression. Give support and understanding. Provide opportunities for him to function effectively and to stay alert. Involve him in household chores, take him to a senior center where he can meet others who have similar conditions, and plan time outdoors. Develop day-to-day routines that can offer a sense of consistency. You can also boost his memory by providing aids that can make his life easier and safer; they may include a calendar, written reminders, large labels, lists, directions, and safety instructions. Use a pill box to help organize and remind him when to take medicines. However, remember to make sure that he does not feel like a person who constantly needs help or feels like a patient with an illness. Respect his thoughts and help him keep his dignity as an individual.

It's the nature of Alzheimer's disease to progressively get worse as memory deteriorates. In the advanced stages of Alzheimer's, round-the-clock care is usually needed. Thinking ahead to these possibilities can help make decisions easier. You will eventually have to determine the long-term care options that are best suited to you and your husband. **VANESSA**

Got Questions & Answers about Home Care is written by Vanessa Valerio, RN, VP and COO for Patient Care at Home Care Orinda. If you would like more information about senior care and how home care can help, please email Vanessa Valerio at vanessav@careindeed.com, call her at (925) 317-3080 or visit their website at www.homecareorinda.com/.