

Our View: More caregiving options as state, county ages

As the elderly population in Iowa and Johnson County continues to grow, an increasing number of Iowans are facing the question of whether they — or their parents — should stay in their own homes or move into a facility that offers various levels of assisted living.

Although most people report they want to live independently, every family needs to keep open to all options and to explore the right mix of family-, friend- and stranger-care that will help extend the quality and quantity of their time together.

For people in the process of becoming a long-term caregiver for a loved one, the staff over at Iowa City Hospice is offering a “Family Caregiver Support Initiative” to address the challenges caregivers often face. (For more information, call Sara Krieger at 688-4203 or email Sara.Krieger@IowaCityHospice.org.)

Over the next six months, the hospice is offering six free classes on a range of topics of interest to family caregivers:

- “Organizing, Managing and Protecting Your Financial and Personal Records” will begin at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday at Pathways Adult Day Health Center (817 Pepperwood Lane) and noon April 24 at Elder Services (1556 S. First Ave. No. 1).
- “Therapeutic Writing for the Family Caregiver” will begin at 5:30 p.m. May 8 at Pathways and noon May 22 at Elder Services.
- A discussion of the book “Stop and Smell the Garbage: A Caregiver’s Story of Survival” will begin at 2 p.m. June 12 in meeting room A of the Iowa City Public Library.
- “Overcoming Caregiver Guilt” will begin at 5:30 p.m. July 10 at Pathways and noon July 24 at Elder Services.
- “The Mechanics of Caregiving: Personal Care and Equipment” will begin at 5:30 p.m. Sept. 11 at Pathways and noon Sept. 25 at Elder Services.
- And “Honoring Your Wishes: A Community-Wide Advance Care Planning Initiative” will begin at 5:30 p.m. Nov. 13 at Pathways and noon Nov. 27 at Elder Services.

When the time comes and families decide to put a loved one in a short- or long-term care facility, they should have detailed plans — and backup plans — to ensure their loved one will be well taken of. To find the right long-term care facility, families should first get their ducks in a row in terms of finances, power of attorney and guardianship. They then need to set up tours at a number of different facilities.

Before those tours, families should read the Department of Inspections and Appeals reports on the different homes (www.dia.iowa.gov).

And during those tours, families should

- Look around to see if the facility feels clean,
- Get a feel for how much other families are involved in the facility,
- Meet the administrative staff,
- Ask to sit in on facility staff meetings, and
- Ask how each facility charges its rates — some will have base charges as well as add-ons for other types of required services.

The process doesn’t end after choosing a home, however. To have the best quality of care, family members need to stay in contact with those providing the daily care of their loved ones.

That doesn’t mean that family members should set themselves up to be watchdogs for the care of their loved one. In an article on choosing a nursing facility, Mayo geriatrician Ken Fleming wrote, “Some think they’ll get better service if they yell at the employees, spy on them or threaten to sue them. However, this approach guarantees failure. If you think negatively, you’ll get negative results.”

But the more involvement families have, the more likely their loved ones will be given sustained, quality care.