

Professional care a great help in dealing with dementia

*By Ellen Waldman
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The next set of housing options will be needed only by a small number of older adults. However, people are living longer, and dementia affects up to 50 percent of people over the age of 85. It's important to know what the local options look like and what they provide.

Dementia care facilities and nursing homes, now called skilled nursing facilities (SNF) can provide care for these needs. So can adult care homes, as I mentioned before.

Robert lived at home with his wife in Ashland. He had Alzheimer's disease and his wife, Janet, was covering up for him, for a long time. They never considered what would happen if he could no longer be cared for at home. The problem became a disaster when he attacked his care provider and his wife in a fit of confusion and frustration. (This is very unusual behavior and not the norm for people with this disease.) The police came and took him to the hospital, handcuffed to a wheelchair. This was so sad, and so unnecessary. Robert had no idea what had happened nor even remembered his actions.

His care needs could not be met at home any longer. I was called in, and found a wonderful dementia care facility for him in Medford. Janet would come and visit him there. He was actually a lot happier being cared for by people with the right training for this disease. His wife was no longer stressed out trying to care for him mostly on her own.

Dementia care is not easy and can take its toll on the whole family.

A memory care unit, also called a dementia care facility, is a fully contained community. It typically has about 16 residents of varying stages of this progressive disease. The facility is locked so that people cannot wander out and get lost. Gated outdoor areas allow them to still enjoy the fresh air. Family and friends can visit and even take them on outings, if that works.

In Ashland, we have Skylark Memory Care (skylarkplace.com; 541-552-0154) adjoining Skylark Assisted Living. There are private and semi-private rooms. All staff is well-trained to communicate effectively and keep the environment low-stress and pleasant. There are several other dementia facilities in Medford: Farmington Square ([Farmington square-medford.com](http://Farmington-square-medford.com); 541-201-5462); Fern Gardens Senior Living (ferngardensseniorliving.com; 541-779-3368) and Prestige Senior Living Arbor Place (prestigecare.com/assisted; 541-773-5380) are good examples.

Rates range from \$4,400 to \$6,000 per month. Additional fees may be charged. Some will accept Medicaid payments.

The last option is a skilled nursing facility. People are here temporarily after an illness or surgery for additional rehab and other medical services. With dementia, some people find themselves living here for the rest of their lives.

When I met Ruth, she was already living in a skilled nursing facility in Medford. She had dementia and ran out of money. I was able to get her qualified for Medicaid and transferred to a smaller, adult care home. She could live the remainder of her life in a quieter environment, which meant so much to her.

A skilled nursing facility is expensive if paid out of pocket. For about 100 days, Medicare pays most of the costs, but after that, it's private pay. At around \$250 a day, it's not sustainable for most. If you qualify for Medicaid, they will cover the costs. In Ashland we have Linda Vista Nursing and Rehabilitation (prestigecare.com/skilled; 541-482-2341). In Medford, there are three others as well.

Ruth had not considered her options while she was still coherent and had the time. She was fortunate that someone on the staff called in a professional on her behalf. Fear and scare tactics about aging and disease never works. But better outcomes do require advance planning. Education and some diligence; that's really what it takes.