

Caregiving shortage shows importance of planning

By Ellen Waldman

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If you look at the number of facilities the Rogue Valley has for assisted living, memory care and adult foster care, not to mention independent or retirement living, you'll see this requires a lot of staffing. I count roughly 30-35 facilities, not including approximately 100 adult foster care homes. Several more assisted and memory care communities are in the process of being built as well. Add to this all the caregiving agencies (around 10 companies), and you'd be right to wonder if we might have a caregiver shortage at some point. The answer is yes, and the time already has arrived.

Here are some true stories I've heard recently.

At one assisted living/independent community, the shortage of caregivers and other staff members has meant that an administrator has had to work double shifts, including one as a caregiver and one as a dining room server. The community just could not get enough employees to fill the need. More than one adult foster care home has closed its doors due to the lack of qualified staff.

The question I hear is this: Can we (and should we) keep building more residences for aging adults without planning for how to reliably staff them?

Every time a new building opens, you often see a flight of people from where they previously worked to this new location. This "job jumping" seems to be very common in this area of employment. People often assume that newer is better. These are hard jobs openings to fill, and there are only so many qualified local workers.

Let's not overlook the fact that most pay from \$11.25-\$13 per hour for some of the hardest work out there. These people have complex lives of their own, not the least of the reasons being lower pay than it takes to afford to live well.

Here are eight trends as reported in a blog called "Caregiver Crisis May Reach Crisis Level" by Oregon Company, Helping Hands Home Care, out of Portland:

(<https://www.helpinghandshomecare.com/caregiver-shortage-may-reach-crisis-level>):

- An aging population demands more services and care
- More people with disabilities require more skilled caregivers
- Labor pool is not keeping up with these demands
- Workers leaving within one year due to low wages, no benefits, and no advancements
- In rural areas (this is our area) there is a severe shortage
- Lack of data on this workforce to the general public
- Shortage of workers is top concern in delivering quality care

I am sorry to report that I don't have an answer to this growing need for more caregivers. People much more informed on this topic than I am are working on this at every level. I do know that this is another reason to plan ahead for care needs. I already am seeing that there are waiting lists for the most

desirable local community assisted living facilities. This might encourage you to look now at what may well be in your future. Putting your name on a waiting list with a deposit means that you'll stand a better chance of getting in when you're ready to move.

Having a consultation with a licensed caregiving agency will inform you on just how much care you can count on receiving. It's not all about needing hands-on, personal care. I like to think of it as companionship care, or for many, simply having an assistant. It's also a mistake to think that only private individuals make good caregivers and those who work for agencies are less competent. Many of them just don't want the responsibility of running a solo business. Although they love this work, they would rather someone else make their schedule, took care of all the legal and financial aspects, and most importantly, kept them employed.

As for the growing shortage, we all need to stay aware of this trend. Please don't assume that you'll be one of the very rare individuals who will not need some type of care. We need to come up with novel ways to meet the needs of our friends and family as well as ourselves. Considering this now might be a small start.

A final word. Here are two free classes that would be very helpful. First, Powerful Tools for Caregivers begins Aug 28. Call Liz at 541-618-7865 at Rogue Valley Council of Governments. Also, through the Alzheimer's Association, a host of summer educational classes. Call 800-272-3900 and get a copy of the schedule.