

When is it time for dementia care?

By Ellen Waldman

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Should I stay or should I go? In this case, the question refers to the right time to move a loved one with dementia into a facility that can care for them. Almost all families want to keep their person at home as long as possible. They love them and feel they are the ones who can best take care of them. Also, in many cases, the costs of placement are more than they can afford.

But aside from finances, sooner is often better than later. It's known that any changes, stress, illnesses, etc., can cause a further decline in an already progressive disease process. Knowing this and waiting means that when the move does occur, the person will probably decline again from the stress of this transition. But when the person has more cognitive capacity, they can manage this change better than when they are less competent. It takes a lot of energy to move, no matter what your age or status might be. Add in the difficulty of dementia and it's really challenging.

The misunderstanding is that family often think they can just wait until the person will not know what's happening. This rarely ever happens until very late in the process. Even then, they are aware of this new situation, but are less able to cope with all these changes.

Besides wanting to provide the care themselves, or lack of sufficient fund, there is another reason people don't place sooner. Up until recently, dementia care facilities simply were not offering programs for those with earlier-stage dementia. But with the lack of adequate daycare respite options, this is changing. Programs at memory care facilities are being added that will engage residents who are still in the early to moderate stages of this process. This is really good news for both the person with this disease and those who are caring for them at home.

Something to take seriously is the toll this intensive care at home costs the one providing this care. Family involved in a 24/7 situation eventually feels overwhelmed and exhausted. What if there was a way to allow them to remain a part of their loved ones' life, but not have the full-time, hands-on caregiving fall to them? Or what happens in those situations where both spouses have some version of dementia? This happens more frequently than you might expect.

One answer is to find a facility that can accommodate a couple in the same room. Over the years, this has been very challenging to find, and families felt split up from one another when they would rather have remained together. With the opening of a new dementia care facility in Ashland, Village at Valley View (VVV) (villagevalleyview.com; 1071 West Jackson Road; 541-482-0888), this arrangement is now available. To be transparent, I have consulted with them as they developed their facility and programs. For those who keep a loved one home longer due to lack of this option, now there is a local solution. This "couple's room" allows for one or both to receive the care they need, while being able to remain close to one another. The well-spouse could come and go during the day, and return back "home" in the evening.

The other vital part that makes this placement work at an earlier stage are the programs, called life enrichment at VVV. These activities address the interests and abilities of residents, no matter what their stage of dementia. This means that people can enter into the facility sooner and find comfort at their level of engagement. Staff also gets to know this person while they are higher functioning as well.

Look for the opening of this bright new facility at the beginning of August. It joins the Ashland community as the second place to offer secured dementia care. Up until now, there's only been Skylark Memory Care (www.skylarkassistedliving.net/our-care-and-services/memory-care; 900 Skylark Place; 541-552-1713). It's known that the right environment, with the most engaging programs, makes for happier residents. Please welcome the Village at Valley View to our community. Their administrator, Sherri Scott, manager@villagevalleyview.com, invites you to tour it once it opens. She and her staff will be an integral part of our town and want you to feel included in its presence here. We are fortunate to have another option in our community, as the need for this is very great.