

"THE LONG-DISTANCE ELDER CARE DILEMMA"

By Mary Moorhead 'On Elder Care'

"Should my elderly parents move from back East to live near my home? Or is it better for them to receive care in their community of 60 years?"

I wish there were a simple answer to the difficult questions involved in long-distance elder care. Commonly, children traipse back and forth across the country, wringing their hands and comparing pros and cons of moving/not moving.

Be careful if you/they choose home care and your elderly parents live in a distant town, because even with hired in-home caregivers, there can be problems. If you are thinking about moving your parents to be near you, here are some aspects to consider.

- Do you parents want to move to your city? Will they adjust well? Will they miss their old friends and community? Are they too sick to move?
- Can they *afford* to live-in your city? For example, Bay Area elder care is often more expensive than other areas.
- Where will they live? Your home? Assisted living? A nursing home nearby?
- If you choose your home, consider actual space and family dynamics. Will there be constant conflict or harmony?
- Consider (quality) facility care, either in your city or in your parents'. If they move to a facility in your city, you are freed of most caregiving tasks and are more able to just visit and enjoy family relations. If your parents do not move to your city, choosing a (quality) facility in their hometown will also save you from many elder care tasks and worries.

If your parents stay where they are, here are some suggestions to help you keep track of their lives and care.

- Get to know your parents' community resources: all Area Agency on Aging (AAA) resources and some care facilities. 800-677-1116.
- Introduce yourself to home caregiving agencies.

- Assess your parents' needs. Meet and talk as a family and set up a clear care plan. Decide who will keep track of legal issues, finances, medical and care needs. Divide these jobs among family members.
- Assess your parents' home for safety. Do they need grab bars or a hospital bed? Is there adequate light? Are there small rugs that can cause them to trip?
- Organize all key information, such as doctors' phone numbers and accounts, medications, attorneys, banks, stockbrokers, neighbors, friends, church associates, AAA resources and seniors centers. Put all the information in a binder for easy access.
- Make sure neighbors or other helpers have extra keys to your parents' home.
- In the notebook, write a list of areas where your parents need help, who provides this help, and who can be a backup. Areas to consider: meals and groceries, chores, shopping, transportation, paying bills and caregiving.
- Set up an easy way to communicate with parents, siblings or neighbors on a regular basis - once a week - by email or phone.
- Establish an in-home emergency response system, perhaps Lifeline and/or an alarm system.
- Finally, no matter your choice, don't get trapped by "overcaring." Remember to take care of the caregiver (yourself)!

This information is reprinted from The Contra Costa Times, Saturday, September 21, 2002, Section D, page 7. You may write to Mary B. Moorhead c/o the Times, P.O. Box 8099, Walnut Creek, CA 94596-8099. Send e-mail to Mbmoorhead@aol.com.