

CHAPTER ONE

Who Needs Special Care?

Activities of Daily Living (ADL)

One reference that may help in deciding whether a person needs special care is the ability to perform “activities of daily living” (ADLs). The number of ADLs an individual is able to perform independently is used not only as a guide for nursing care facilities to determine placement, but also by insurance companies to determine an individual’s eligibility for coverage.

ADLs:

- **Bathing, dressing, grooming:**
Can the person shower without assistance? Does the person need assistance to get dressed in the morning? Help with personal appearance?
- **Dining:**
Does the person have any difficulties preparing and eating food? Is the person able to swallow?
- **Continence (bladder and bowel control):**
Are adult pads needed?
- **Toileting:**
Does the person have difficulties using the facilities? Does the person need handrails or a special toilet?
- **Mobility and Transfer:**
Is the person able to get from the bed to a chair? Can the person walk with a walker? Or is a potential fall a major concern?

Other Considerations.

Even if a person is perfectly capable of performing the ADLs, there could be many other reasons for requiring special care or assistance:

- **Apathy towards financial and/or personal affairs** (*unpaid bills, unbalanced checkbook, checks that have not been deposited*)
- **Uncorrectable vision or hearing impairment which impedes the ability to function independently**
- **Forgetfulness** (*leaving the stove on or the doors unlocked*)
- **Poor hygiene** (*infrequent baths soiled clothes*)
- **Inadequate diet** (*eating nutritionally unsound foods or skipping meals*)

- **No concern for appearance** (*not shaving beard or washing hair, wearing old, mismatched clothes*)

Caregiver Considerations

Some caregivers have the time, energy and stamina to care for a very ill patient or spouse at home. Others (for example a young woman with a full-time job and family responsibilities), may find care giving duties overwhelming. When deciding if a person needs special care, the caregiver should not only consider the abilities and welfare of the loved one, but also keep in mind his or her own personal situation and capabilities.

The goal of any caregiver is to offer his or her loved one the highest level of care and the greatest amount of independence. If a caregiver is unable to reach this goal because of the demands of a job or family situation – or for any reason – then the caregiver should seek additional help.

Caregiver considerations:

- *Is the caregiver's job at risk because of care giving obligations?*
- *Are finances a great concern?*
- *What kind of care and expertise can the caregiver offer the person?*
- *Are the care giving duties too physically demanding?*
- *Is the caregiver's health suffering?*
- *Is the caregiver tired, depressed, or experiencing feelings of being "all alone?"*
- *Is it difficult to remain patient with the person receiving care? Is it becoming increasingly difficult for the caregiver to control his or her temper?*
- *Are the caregiver's duties straining another relationship? Is the caregiver trying to please too many people and not really pleasing anyone?*

Taking The First Step

Making a decision as to the best care option for a particular person does not have to be a solitary choice – there are many individuals who can help counsel and guide the caregiver.

Here are just a few starting points:

- **The family physician:** familiar with the person receiving care, the doctor can recommend care options to the caregiver and give referrals, too.
- **Admission coordinator of a skilled nursing, assisted living and/or continuing care retirement community:** this person can assist individuals in determining the proper level of care within a continuum of care which typically includes skilled nursing, assisted living and independent living.
- **Social service department of a local hospital:** this department is responsible for helping discharged patients find and receive appropriate follow-up care. They are very familiar with the area care options and are usually quite willing to give advice and referrals to caregivers who call and explain their situations.
- **Local Area Agency on Aging (council or commission):** counselors are generally available for advice and referrals to adult care options; some states (such as Pennsylvania) offer a program called “Options” which assists people to find the most appropriate and least restrictive level of care. The program is free or on a sliding scale based on the person’s ability to pay.
- **Minister, priest or rabbi:** clergy are generally familiar with local adult care options (particularly community services which are free or sponsored by religious organizations); and/or a referral service.
- **Geriatrics/Gerontology department at a local university:** this is one of the most “untapped” resources available. Some departments offer counseling, referral services, and information.
- **Geriatric care consultant/manager:** for a price (\$50 - \$150/hour), a professional will assess the person’s abilities and make care recommendations. The consultant may also assist in locating and coordinating arrangements for the selected care option(s), advise the person as to his or her eligibility for Medicare/Medicaid, and serve as an advocate for the person with care providers and benefits payors.