

Placement Series: Making the Decision

Caring for someone with Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia (ADRD) can be a very rewarding experience yet also a very stressful one. Caregivers often promise, with the best of intentions, to look after their family member at home and to never "place" them in a long term care home. This promise, however, is often unable to be kept due to the nature of cognitive impairment and the enormous demands that are placed on the caregiver.

Thinking About Placement:

When is the right time, for you the caregiver, to THINK about the placement process? The answer is: *as soon as you are able to*. This doesn't mean that you have to put the person on a waiting list as soon as diagnosis of ADRD is made. It does mean that it is helpful to take tours of long-term care homes in your area, with your family member if possible, to determine what the best 'fit' will be. Call your local Community Care Access Center (CCAC) to get a full listing of long-term care homes and their numbers so that you can arrange for tours. The CCAC can give you information on the placement process, what services are provided by long-term care homes, how much those services cost and a helpful checklist of questions that you can bring with you when touring homes in order to help you compare. The CCAC is also the agency that you must contact in order to get the placement process started. You can reach North Simcoe Muskoka CCAC at 705 721-8010 or 1 888 721-2222. If you live in the South Simcoe area, contact the Central CCAC at 905 895-1240 or 1 888 470-2222.

Initiating the Placement Process

When is the right time for you to *initiate* the placement process? This is a very complicated question and the answer must take into consideration many different factors.

Usually a caregiver has a scenario that will define in his/her mind when the "right" time will be (when she becomes incontinent; when he's no longer able to recognize me; never). Often times though the caregiving role ends up being different than expected and long term care must be considered before the anticipated scenario comes to pass. Again, many different factors must be taken into consideration when thinking about initiating the placement process.

Consider the following questions:

- Do you have health problems that impose on your ability to look after your family member?
- Are you getting enough sleep every night to have enough energy the next day to provide care?
- Does the person exhibit responsive behaviors that are difficult to deal with?
- Do you lack important resources needed to assist you in your role (friends, neighbours or relatives that can help in some way, not enough in-home services, lack of transportation especially in rural areas)?
- Are you living with the person with dementia or is your caregiving role a long distance one?

- Does the person have special needs that complicate the situation (eg. impairment with vision or hearing, colostomy, problems with swallowing)?
- Are you getting upset over things that were once minor, crying a lot, feeling helpless or have other signs of depression?
- Was your caregiving role taken on voluntarily or is it done out of duty?
- Has a doctor or other health care professional given any indication as to how things are progressing and when to consider the initiating the placement process?
- Is your situation made more complex by troubling family dynamics?
- Will placement allow you more time to devote to family, a job, or yourself which you may have been neglecting?
- Will placement allow you to spend more quality time with your family member?

If you answered “yes” to a number of the questions above, now may be the time to start the placement process.

Everyone is Different

Although there are commonalities in the caregiving experience, no one person copes with the demands in the same way. Every situation is different! It is healthy to speak with other caregivers, to share your experiences and gain valuable support and insight

from each other. It is NOT healthy to compare your abilities as a caregiver to the abilities of others and place unrealistic expectations on yourself. We would all like to think that we have “super powers” and can handle any kind of stress that is thrown our way but this just isn’t the case. Know your limits (we all have them), try to be introspective and ask yourself how much longer you’ll be able to continue in the caregiving role. You don’t want to wait until you’re completely overwhelmed before you put your family members name on the list for a long-term care home. Placement in times of crisis is never pleasant and can make it harder for you to resolve any feelings you might have about what needs to be done.

Supporting You

There are many people who can help you to make the decision, such as your doctor, other health care professionals involved in the care of your family member, your family and friends. The Alzheimer Society of Simcoe County is always here to help you throughout your journey! We offer education, support groups, individual and family counseling, advocacy and referral to other resources that might help you. All of our services are free and are provided in a supportive and confidential manner. Please call us at 705 722-1066 or 1 800 265-5391 to discuss your specific situation and what services are right for you. We look forward to hearing from you.

Summary

So, when is it time to think about placement? *NOW*.
When is the time to initiate placement? *When you feel it's time* after taking into consideration the many different factors that affect your unique situation. Even after considering all the issues that are impacting on your situation you still might not know the answer or you might know the answer deep down inside you but find it too painful to act upon. The decision is never an easy one!

When you are ready, there are the following other information sheets in the Placement Series:

- Day of Placement
- Adjustment following Placement
- Visiting
- Communicating with Staff

Other resources available from the Alzheimer Society include:

Adjusting to LTC

Caregiving Options: Considering LTC

January 2014

