

Navigating Eldercare

Atascadero News

August 27, 2010

Word Divas

Atascadero is growing older. Eavesdrop on the chatter at Starbucks or Colby Jacks on any given day and you will get an earful of elder stories. Senior care concerns burden our population of 28,000, one-third of which is over the age of 50.

That means many Atascaderans are senior citizens or have an elderly parent or grandparent needing to transition from independent living to a safer, more age-appropriate environment.

Older adults want to stay self-reliant and in control of their lives for as long as possible. But at what point should a shift from independent living to assisted living be considered?

Where do you find the services that provide help for the household tasks or personal care that aging adults need? What is available in the North County for home care, assisted living, residential care, a nursing home, or Alzheimer's care? How do you know which choice will be the right one? When and how do you help a parent or grandparent make the changes facing them in their later years?

All of these questions can be addressed by a personal consultant for senior transitions—a “one-stop-shopping” expert who will help your family assess your unique situation and then find the best environment for your senior based on personality, needs, preferences, and finances. A personal consultant will help everyone involved adjust to the changes that come with aging. In addition, these services are free.

Here are some of the things you can expect from a personal consultant:

- A complete assessment of your situation
- A commitment to work with siblings and family living locally or in different parts of the country ensuring that all are on the same page and that the family relationships keep their integrity
- Assistance with financial planning and information on available funding
- Suggestions for dealing with legal matters
- An understanding of local eldercare services and Medicare
- Up-to-date information of available state-licensed options for eldercare in the Atascadero area

- Help with medical paperwork and communication with hospitals and doctors
- Tours for you and your senior of suggested facilities
- Referrals for in-home care agencies, moving companies, elder-law attorneys, estate planning, and veteran's assistance
- A commitment to ensuring everything involved in a change to a new location is done properly
- Periodic check-ins to ensure that your senior's needs are being met
- All services free of charge

There are several personal consultants for senior transitions who provide help in the Atascadero area and come highly recommended by Twin Cities Community Hospital. Carla Muller with A Place for Mom www.aplaceformom.com and Charmaine Peterson from Senior Living Consultants www.seniorlivingconsultants.com are two of them.

Muller recommends educating yourself early so you are ready when faced with life situations that require you to make quick decisions.

“Ninety percent of these decisions are emotional,” she said, “and you want to get your ducks in a row before the need happens.”

Miller also suggests using a personal consultant to help plan a family meeting before your senior ever shows signs of needing assistance or relocation. This way, your loved one can make his or her wishes known and options can be discussed while he or she is still able.

Legal papers, such as a medical power of attorney for medical decisions and a durable power of attorney for financial responsibilities, can be prepared in advance and filed for future use.

Charmaine Peterson finds it rewarding to do the legwork required to help families going through a time of difficult change.

“Sometimes the process is baby steps, but my commitment is to help the family from beginning to end with compassion, understanding, and reliable information to make the necessary choices,” she said. “I feel it is my personal calling to assist families from all over San Luis Obispo County find the right fit for their senior.” Growing older brings many unexpected changes to seniors, causing them to worry about their independence and their place in the lives of those they love. Adult

children eventually assume more of a parental role, one for which they are rarely prepared.

As seniors start to change physically and mentally, those who love them often feel overwhelmed—with good reason. Negotiating the labyrinth of needs for an elderly loved one is difficult, time consuming, and confusing. Therefore, contacting a personal consultant for senior transitions is a wise move and recommended strategy for all concerned.

Editor's note: The above article was written by the Word Divas, made up of Mary Weber, Jeannette Morris, Susan Gaddis and Diane Ramirez with Susan Gaddis taking the lead on this article.