

Senior Care Facilities Promote Community, Social Interaction

Need For Services Grows With Rising Elderly Population

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Deciding on a safe and comfortable place to live out the years of your retirement can be an important step in a person's life.

Making sure the proper assistance, medical treatment and general care is provided has become just as equally important for today's growing senior population as more people are now outliving the generation that came before them.

In fact, due to advancements in medicine, health information, technology and standards of care, more people are even living to be 100 years old. America's centurion population doubled to 72,000 over the last decade, according to the latest statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau.

People over the age of 65 currently take up a majority of the nation's healthcare services, according to senior care advocates and specialists, and the need for such services as assisted living facilities and nursing homes has become of mainstream significance with each passing decade.

But how do you determine what's best for you? Where can you find resources? And how can you afford it?

According to Dr. Susan Melvin, D.O., a family physician trained in geriatrics at Long Beach Memorial Medical Center, caring for seniors takes a collaboration of efforts, from social workers, involved in helping to determine a person's activity level, appropriate placement and interaction with the family, to physical and occupational therapists.

"It's not just about physicians," she said. "When you care for these patients it really requires a team."

Determining the right facility not only involves affordability, but also can be specific to a person's functions of daily activity, Melvin said. "These kinds of transitions aren't age-based at all, it's based on a person's function level," she said. While seniors are often encouraged and want to

remain at home to be independent, or "younger than their age," certain factors can determine whether or not that's the right choice.

"If they stay in their homes and can no longer shop for themselves and they have no social interaction, they're losing those independent activities of daily living, which often times increases incidents of depression and neglect," Melvin said. "In an assisted living there's other people around, there's daily contact, you know they're getting medication . . . We don't want to inadvertently neglect our seniors just because we aren't paying attention."

There are three forms of care facilities for seniors, including: independent living, where seniors are able to function on their own; assisted living, where seniors are provided with caregivers for daily functions; and skilled nursing facilities, where licensed nurses are on hand for medical treatment. While some facilities provide a mixture of all three categories, they all vary with different costs, services, licensing requirements and needs.

Residential Care Facilities For The Elderly

Residential Care Facilities for the Elderly (RCFEs) can encompass both independent living facilities and assisted living facilities. Typically, they provide care, supervision and assistance with activities of daily living, such as bathing and grooming. They may also provide incidental medical services under special care plans, according to the California Department of Social Services (CDSS).

The facilities, also known as retirement homes or board and care homes, provide services to persons 60 years of age or older and persons under 60 with compatible needs.

RCFEs are licensed by the State of California and can be found by visiting the CDSS Web site database, www.cclld.ca.gov, where people are able to request facility records and information.

In Long Beach, there are 44 such licensed facilities, according to the site.

These facilities range in size from six or less beds that can be operated out of a home to over 100 beds in a large-scale facility. The residents require varying levels of personal care and protective supervision.

One such facility is Vista Del Mar Senior Living located at 3360 Magnolia Ave. The 200-bed facility offers assisted living and independent living as well as services for "memory care," a secured area for people with advanced stages of Alzheimer's or Dementia.

James Bender, the operator's vice president of operations, said the company recently purchased the facility just last year as its first venture into senior housing after primarily owning office buildings in the Bixby Knolls area. He said the building has been operating as an assisted living facility since its inception in 1982.

With about 50 employees, the facility has a licensed nurse as its administrator and full time med techs, who distribute medication, along with a practicing medical doctor who visits patients. Caregivers assist with daily living activities, such as bathing, dressing and grooming.

The most beneficial part of living assisted facilities is the social interaction they provide through a full week of scheduled activities planned out by the activities director, Bender said. "The biggest thing that we see is when families come in here, often times mom or dad is living at home and they don't get much socialization, we hear so many times they are staying in the house, watching TV and don't really do anything," he said. "One of the benefits of assisted living is they benefit from socialization and start interacting with other people their own age who have common interests."

Another benefit of assisted living is that residents no longer have to cook for themselves or worry about housekeeping, and are able to focus more on enjoying life. "It works, essentially like a hotel would," Bender said. "They get housecleaning services and laundry services. So it really takes the big burden off of an elderly per-

son to have to do these types of things for themselves and lets them focus on enjoying whatever activities they would like to do, whether it be reading or going on trips.”

The facility is currently 100 percent private pay, with room rates ranging from \$1,200 for a semi-private room up to \$4,500 for a private room in memory care. The facility offers a dining room, activity room and outside courtyard. The owner is currently in the process of doing a ground-up renovation of the facility, with repainting the exterior, re-carpeting, lighting and furniture.

In this economy it's important to remain affordable, Bender said. “We've kept our rates very reasonable to stay competitive with the economy. We have a lot of good competition in the area, but we like to pride ourselves as providing an excellent value with an excellent level of care.”

The Breakers of Long Beach, located downtown at 210 E. Ocean Blvd. in a historic building built in 1926, offers full time staff for assisted living and independent living facilities with an elegant dining room, game and entertainment room and living area.

Dan Cooper, the facility's executive director, said the 178-bed facility, currently has availability for studios, one-bedroom and two-bedroom units, with prices ranging from around \$1,600 to \$4,000, depending on room size and level of care. “When it comes to the amenities for the apartment everything's included: the utilities, the cable, laundry, transportation,

activities, housekeeping, and all your maintenance,” he said.

The facility offers three levels of care, with level one providing medication distribution and bathing, level two providing “continence care,” assisting with dressing, grooming and bathing, and full care, which is full assistance with daily activities. He said the facility is predominantly private pay with the exception of those with long-term care insurance. There are also some special offers for new residents.

RCFEs are governed by the state's Title 22 housing regulations, with a long list of requirements. Each facility has to have a licensed administrator who has to meet certain criteria from the correct level of staff training to the proper level of financing to run the facility. Each case is determined on the level of care that a certain facility provides, said Oscar Ramirez, a spokesperson for the CDSS.

Facilities are inspected at random about every five years after receiving preliminary licensing. The state checks up on about 30 percent of assisted living facilities throughout California every year. The state department also investigates complaints on a regular basis. He said people are encouraged to check out a facility through records available through the department upon request before applying.

“We can take action that's up to closing the facility, decertifying them as an administrator and excluding them for life from ever working, being in or being employed

by a facility that we license,” Ramirez said. “When we do take these actions we don't take them lightly.”

Continuing Care Retirement Communities

What's designated as Skilled Nursing Facilities, (SNFs), commonly referred to as nursing homes, offer the highest hospital level of care, not only assisting with daily functions, but also providing medical on-site assistance such as diagnosis.

All SNFs, however, are licensed and inspected by the federal government through the California Department of Public Health (CDPH). Much like RCFEs, the state provides records and information upon request by visiting a database at www.cdph.gov.

Which agency has jurisdiction is “entirely dependent on the level of care being provided in each section of the facility,” said CDPH spokesperson Ralph Montano. “If it's a registered nurse who's actually helping someone and making a diagnosis, then we have jurisdiction over that facility.”

SNF facilities are required under federal law to provide certain rights, including that patients be treated with respect, participate in activities, be free from discrimination, be free from abuse and neglect, be free from restraints and be able to make complaints. SNF services are generally funded with the assistance of Medicare and Medicaid funding.

Some facilities offer a mixture of independent, assisted living and also SNFs.



Vista Del Mar living quarters and bedroom.



Game and entertainment room at The Breakers



The Breakers common area for relaxation



The library at Bixby Knolls Towers

These newer models of providing all three levels of care are often called Continuing Care Retirement Communities. The premise is to provide a continuum of care on the same campus, so residents can become familiar with an area and don't have to move from one facility to the next in case of the sudden need for more extensive medical treatment.

One such retirement community in Long Beach is Bixby Knolls Towers, established in 1963 at 3737 Atlantic Ave. It offers 138 independent senior apartments, either studios or one-bedroom and two-bedroom units. The assisted living section offers 49 beds and the skilled nursing portion consists of 99 beds.

Depending on the level of care and size of the preferred room, prices range from \$1,840 to \$3,705. Utilities, such as cable, are included in the rent, with the exception of phone service. Amenities include an outside patio and BBQ area, a library, gym, dining room, business center and living area.

The need for such quality communities continues to grow, regardless of the recession, said Chuck Stevens, the facility's activities director. "It just so happens we're the best one in Long Beach, we stay full pretty much all the time," he said.

Many of the residents in independent living still drive their own cars, Stevens said. "When they come to the independent side, all they have to do is come in and fill out

an application, we do a background check on them and if they qualify, we just move them in. On the other side, they work with the social services directors and doctor's offices and so forth," he said.

Marsha Greenfield, a lobbyist for Leading Age, a national nonprofit advocacy group for senior care facilities and services, said the most pressing issue facing the elderly is providing adequate funding for the growing needs of the senior population.

With more people living longer and the baby boomer generation now entering retirement age, the strain on the country's healthcare system is becoming greater and greater. In fact, due to budget cuts, the federal government is proposing reforming how Medicare and Medicaid dollars are distributed by switching to a block grant system that could cut funds for senior care.

It's important to come up with new ways of funding and senior care assistance models for the future, Greenfield said. "Communities are really looking at ways to advance, improve and change the way we address consumers' desires and needs to move the ball forward so that aging is a more exciting thing," she said.

A Social And Medical Intervention

Dr. Rudolf Haider, M.D., a 20-year trained geriatric practitioner at Los Alamitos Medical Center, serving nursing homes in the Greater Long Beach area and

at Leisure World in Seal Beach, said most often times it's important to think about assisted living "when you get to the point where you're dangerous to yourself or others at home and you can't do those activities of daily living anymore."

However, he added, it's a grey area, because seniors continue to want to be as independent as possible for as long as they can. "It's an ongoing process. Some people are really sharp at 95 while other people get to be 75 and start having memory problems and forget how to do one task or another," Haider said.

Melvin points out that the goal is to keep people at the maximum amount of function and independence as they can, but it has to be done safely. She added that it's important to encourage seniors and their family members to have a healthy discussion with their primary doctors about "end of life issues," or advanced directives, before it's too late.

"There's a driver of the bus and they can drive that bus all the way till the end, but they sometimes have to trust those that care for them to help provide the right information," Melvin said. "People really need to be coached to have that conversation." ■



Patio area at Bixby Knolls Towers



Outdoor area at Vista Del Mar



Vista Del Mar activity room



Dining room at The Breakers