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Assisted living: Know the facts

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Many of our elderly, and even family members, have a misconception of what assisted living is all about. Assisted living is a safe, clean home-like living arrangement for people who need some assistance with activities of daily living and personal care. Many have a minimum age limit (often 55 years of age). Most are private or semi-private rooms, and some may include furniture. They provide personal care and services on a 24-hour basis, which emphasizes supervision, protection, and assistance while bathing, eating, grooming, and supervision of medications. Services include three meals a day planned by a dietitian, with additional snack if desired or recommended, laundry service, transportation to and from appointments and shopping, activities for all residents on a daily basis, and hair salons.

Payment is usually on a month-to-month basis. Some facilities will request first and last month's rent or first month and a damage deposit of some kind. Many require a 30-day written notice if moving out and some will allow pets with an additional deposit. Methods of payment include private pay, long-term care insurance, or Medicaid and/or Veteran's Administration benefits.

The time it takes to find a room depends upon different factors. Some facilities do not take Medicaid, or all the Medicaid rooms may be taken. If that is the case, it could take a year or two before a Medicaid bed becomes available. You may need to put your name on a waiting list.

The time to look and become educated in what is out there is when you are strong of mind and body. It is important to educate yourself before the need is upon you. You should ask what kind of rooms are available and what the cost is, whether the facility accepts Medicaid, insurance or VA benefits; and whether there are openings, expected openings, or if they have a waiting list.

Other questions to ask are whether you have to move if your private funds are depleted. Will they supply the care you are interested in, what your rights are as a resident, and whether you can bring a pet?

Most assisted living facilities are beautiful and very well managed, but always, always do your homework.

Families can find out more about a facility by taking a tour. Ask if you can have

lunch or dinner with your tour so you can get a sense of the meals the facility serves. Request to eat with or in close proximity to the residents so you can observe the interactions between the residents and the caregivers.

In many cases, residents can move in and stay until the end of their time. As a resident's needs or level of care change, the staff will be there to help.

Residents do not lose any of the rights they had before entering into assisted living. Friends and families are welcome to spend as much time with you as you wish.

They can even join residents for meals. There are usually private areas where families can celebrate or have private time as well.

Before you move into your new home, this would be a good time to call the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, ask for the residential assisted living facility program, (208) 334-6626.

They will be able to tell you if the home you are interested in has had any reportable incidents or irregularities.

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