



Nursing Home or Staying Home, how do you decide?

As an educator of healthcare services I'm often asked this very question. My frequent response would be; if you have unlimited resources then by all means keep your loved one home. After all who doesn't want to be home. I have been slowly rethinking my thoughts on this subject. Listening to the stories, complaints, fears and concerns of those who have tried to keep their loved ones home I think it best to present the pros and cons of this very difficult decision.

The first consideration is usually the cost. Nursing home care is more expensive than homecare. In the home care environment you are contracting with an organization to send individuals to do certain tasks or have particular responsibilities such as shopping, house cleaning or providing some level of care for your loved one. You may be responsible for supplementing those tasks and care needs not provided. Nursing home care provides a professional medical staff comprised of doctors, nurses, certified nursing assistants, social workers, therapists, dietitians and recreational therapists who manage the intricate needs of your loved one 24 hours a day. These professionals provide complex medical care, spiritual support, innovative recreational activities, specialized diets, housekeeping and laundry and end of life care and support.

The second consideration is care management. In the nursing home environment you have a team of medical professionals who manage care but also a team of administrative professionals making sure that care has quality and your needs are met as well. Families often need support in dealing with an elderly loved one. They have their own internal struggles that are recognized and addressed in the nursing home environment. There is assistance for financial issues and questions. When a loved one stays home you and usually you alone becomes the care manager. It's often very difficult to provide care for the elderly with complex medical conditions or cognitive deficits. Trying to find that special person who is trained in dementia care or has that compassionate heart when things become difficult can be a struggle. The care givers that don't show when needed and call out unexpectedly can cause considerable strain for those of us who are employed, have planned special events or much needed vacations and rely on their services. Then there are those who just don't make you feel safe when you walk out the door.

The third consideration is the quality of life. Socialization is very important to all of us especially our aging population. As we get older we have a greater need to validate the lives we had lived and know that they had purpose and meaning. Often you will hear an elderly adult say "I want to go home", even when they are home. I have to wonder if they aren't speaking of a time, not a place where they felt comfortable and purposeful. Loneliness and isolation are detriments to healthy aging. Depression in our elderly is real and can lead to weight loss, cognitive decline, a failure to thrive and suicide. Staying home even with the best caregiver may not be enough. The stories they tell over and over again need to be embraced. The value of peer to peer conversation is immeasurable. Staying active physically, cognitively and emotionally is vital to healthy aging.

In conclusion these thoughts provide food for more thought. The decision presented is difficult and keeping our aging loved one healthy and happy takes planning and support.

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