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HOSPICE

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The Aging at Home Trend for Today's Seniors

As they age, boomers increasingly want to stay in their homes, and they are finding ways to do so. Whether remodeling to stay in a familiar neighborhood, downsizing to a more suitable option, or hiring help that will match their health condition and lifestyle, many now can age comfortably at home.

This is a major financial commitment on a fixed income, requiring retirement dollars to be split among growing housing expenses, leisure pursuits, and healthcare needs. A variety of services not always covered by Medicare are desired or needed at some point by most seniors who choose to live independently, such as:

- Medical support for chronic health conditions, often with in-home care
- Personal care, such as help with medications, bathing and grooming, various therapies, even companionship
- Housecleaning and laundry services, pet care, food shopping, meal preparation, and help paying bills
- Odd job/handyman services, such as gardening and lawn care, window and gutter cleaning, trash removal and running errands
- Transportation for socializing, entertainment, and non-emergency medical appointments

Healthcare Help at Home

A paper recently published in *The Gerontologist* reviewed living arrangement options for seniors over the age of 80. The report found that the following three options were preferred equally:

- Assisted living/continuing care retirement community
- Care at home with family/paid help
- Moving in to live with an adult child



This trend is causing senior housing occupancy rates to drop (especially for nursing homes), and the average age when people enter senior housing to rise. For the first time in over 50 years, more Americans are choosing to get medical care at home and to die at home rather than in a hospital, according to the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

This is now possible with help from home health agencies and hospices. Other companies are forming to offer privately paid additional in-home care, which includes “house calls” to improve quality, reduce costs, and prevent hospitalizations. Palliative care and guardianship programs provide care for “unfriended” patients (those without a live-in caregiver).

Various technologies also help the elderly stay safely in their homes, including a computerized blood pressure cuff that records the patient’s status, blood and lab tests done at home, and portable x-rays and ultrasound equipment. A smartphone can even function as a heart monitor.

Please contact us if you’d like our social workers to provide information about local services available for seniors and their caregivers.

Proper Nutrition for Seniors

Nearly 8% of Americans aged 60 and older go hungry each day, according to Feeding America, a national network of more than 200 food banks. Experts say that poor diet can make illnesses worse and slow down the body's ability to heal. Chronic conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure are better managed with a balanced diet.

Health care for malnourished chronically ill patients can be complicated and costly. But one study found that healthy home-delivered meals can prevent unwanted emergency room visits and hospitalizations. The Bipartisan Policy Center reports that Medicare could save \$1.57 in healthcare costs for every \$1 spent delivering free meals to frail seniors who were recently discharged from the hospital.

In many communities, there are programs such as Meals on Wheels that help address malnutrition as well as monitor home hazards and social isolation. Along with nutrition to support recovery, interaction with volunteers during the meal drop-off can assure the patient is relatively stable and has access to regular meals.

For those who qualify financially, the federal SNAP (food-stamp) program provides a monthly allowance for purchasing nutritious food at grocery stores, convenience stores, and some farmers' markets and co-op food programs. Benefits come each month on a plastic debit card. For information, go to www.benefits.gov/benefit/361.

Together with food banks, community groups, churches, and other volunteer organizations, these programs aim to help alleviate the nutritional challenges seniors face when living alone.

Tips to Track Your Meds

People aged 80–84 take an average of 18 prescriptions a year, plus a variety of

over-the-counter drugs, herbal remedies, and vitamins. All these medications may cause harmful interactions, so keeping your healthcare providers informed is important.

The New York Times reports that this phenomenon of taking five or more drugs, called “polypharmacy,” can take a toll on seniors' health. Decreased body size, changes in the body (more fat, less water), and decreased liver and kidney function make it more difficult to absorb the medications and cause the drugs to build up in the body.

While some medicines are used to treat an underlying condition, other drugs address temporary side effects, such as pain, nausea, or constipation. Be sure to discuss these everyday drugs, dosages, and schedule with your healthcare providers and pharmacist, especially when going home after a hospital or nursing home stay, and at your annual doctor checkup.

Even with a proper list in hand, it can still be confusing to organize which medicines to take morning, noon, or night. Some are best with food, others on an empty stomach. Refilling prescriptions can also be difficult when they are ordered by different doctors.

To help you manage multiple medications:

- Fill all your prescriptions at one pharmacy.
- Get prescriptions refilled early so you don't run out.
- Gather all medications, vitamins, and supplements into one location.
- Pre-sort medications for the week, and use a pill box with enough compartments for every dose you'll need throughout each day.
- Set a reminder.
- Make a list and update it regularly as prescriptions change.
- Ask someone to help you.



Some people mistakenly think hospice care is just about dying...nothing could be further from the truth. Hospice helps patients and families focus on living. Angels Grace Hospice, LLC, brings comfort, dignity and peace to help people with a life-limiting illness live every moment of life to the fullest. We also provide support for family and friends.

We are licensed in the state of Illinois, Medicare Certified, Joint Commission Accredited and are locally owned and operated by experienced professionals dedicated to providing excellent end-of-life care for Will, Cook, DuPage, Kendall, Grundy, and Kane counties. Please contact us for more information.

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To comfort always... this is our work

