



# Caregiver Topic

## The Nursing Home Decision

Faye Kesner, caregiver and support group leader shares, “My children came to me and said, ‘It is time’,” after she faced her own emergency surgery. Over time most dementia caregivers like Mrs. Kesner face the decision to place a loved one in an Assisted Living or Nursing Home facility.

Caregivers commonly ask, “When will I know it is time to place?” For some caregivers just asking this question is a bold step, but then it leads to the next question, “How do I choose?” Then caregivers finally make the step realizing that the emotional impact continues after placement as they deal with issues of loss and grief. Yet, despite the difficult road, placement can be a positive move for the person living with dementia (PLWD).

### When it is Time to Place

Usually several events prompt a decision to place in a facility like a medical event (for either the caregiver or PLWD) or caregiver exhaustion. For Mrs. Kesner, she was completely exhausted and ended up needing emergency surgery when her children finally prompted her to decide. “You just know,” she said, “but it still is not easy to make the decision.” Lastly, behaviors and issues related to the disease often force the placement decision.

Julie Worley, Director of Family Assistance at the Alzheimer’s Association Miami Valley adds, “Caregivers of someone in the early stages might

see safety issues like driving, leaving the stove on or calling neighbors at odd hours.” In the middle stages, behaviors that prompt placement are sleep issues that keep caregivers up all night, aggressive behavior the family cannot handle, wandering, etc. Another issue for caregivers is the 24/7 care that often overwhelms the person. In the later stages, the care becomes physical and the family, already exhausted from years of care, simply cannot keep up with the physical demands



*Mrs. Fay Kesner, caregiver and Fairborn support group leader with her husband Bob together at his assisted living facility.*

### Two Indicators for Placement

The two indicators for placement are caregiver health and the person living with dementia’s (PLWD) well-being. One caregiver shared, “I think my Grandma’s death came because of the load she was carrying. I wish we would have intervened sooner.” If the caregiver’s health is suffering, than placement options should be explored. Secondly, consider the PLWD’s well-being in the discussion because at times the person will do better after placement because they have social interaction and activities.

### How to Choose

“Start early and use respite stays,” suggests Mrs. Kesner. She had chosen one facility for a week-long respite only to decide that she would not return because the care did not meet her expectations. When she tried a second place for another week-long respite, she found that the care met her expectations.

(Continued on page 13)

## The Nursing Home Decision

(Continued from page 12)

When the medical emergency occurred, her family called that facility and they were able to help them in an emergency. Her second piece of advice is to look for quality of care. "I visited different facilities at different times. I would also speak to the paid caregivers when I visited and not just the marketing staff. The caregivers are more open and you can judge whether they are friendly or not," Mrs. Kesner added.

Families now have on-line resources like [www.medicare.gov/nhcompare](http://www.medicare.gov/nhcompare) to read quality reports. Lastly, talk with other families who have made the decision which you can do by attending support groups and education meetings. **Visit [www.alz.org/dayton](http://www.alz.org/dayton) for a list of education programs and support groups.**

### Emotional Impact

"When a week had passed after placing my husband," Mrs. Kesner shares, "I told my daughters I wanted to bring Dad home. It feels like I had given up." The emotions of placement are difficult to process. Many caregivers feel guilt, loneliness and sadness after the decision has been made. Caregivers should be prepared to face these emotions by garnering support. "The difficulty of the decision passes over time, but I encourage others to find support immediately after placement. One of my daughters stayed with me for a few days which really helped," she adds.

Mrs. Worley suggests, "Support from friends, family, pastors, counselors, support groups and professionals help the caregiver cope with the emotional impact." Mrs. Kesner notes, "The

## Nursing Home Decision Class offered in May

The **Caregiver Essentials** program will feature the topic, *Nursing Home Decision*, on Tuesday, May 24th at 6:30 p.m. at First Christian Church 3638 Springfield Urbana Rd, Springfield, OH. Free respite care available.

To **register** or learn about the full list of education programs being offered, contact Velma Barber at (937) 291-3332, (800) 272-3900 or [velma.barber@alz.org](mailto:velma.barber@alz.org).

Alzheimer's Association has been a lot of help. Bob and I started together at the Early Stage programming. I joined a support group and went to education classes which helped me prepare for what is to come." In fact, she now leads a support group in Fairborn to help others by listening and sharing what she has learned.

The decision proves difficult for many families, but over time and with much support, it can be a positive move for those who can no longer care for the person at home. Placing a person in a facility is not a defeat, but a continuation of the care provided to the person.

The Kesners continue to share their lives and even go on dates for ice cream or out to dinner at Bob Evans. They have signed up with the Reducing Disability in Alzheimer's Disease (RDAD) program so that they can interact during her visits in a meaningful way. "I am satisfied with the care he gets," Mrs. Kesner notes, "I come to visit now, and we can be together, and I can enjoy his presence without being exhausted."



Area Agency on Aging  
PSA 2

Answers on Aging for  
West Central Ohio

1-800-258-7277

[www.info4seniors.org](http://www.info4seniors.org)