

*The Best
of
the Rest*

**CHOOSING A RETIREMENT
RESIDENCE OR A NURSING
HOME**



Doug and Judy Robinson



This e-book is part of a series and contains expanded advice, wisdom
and experiences from the book:

**The Best of the Rest:
Downsizing for Boomers and Seniors
(2010)**

All e-books in the series:

Downsizing: Lots of Choices

The Five Steps of Downsizing

Aging in Place

Choosing a Retirement Residence or a Nursing Home

Multi-Generational Households

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Luxury Living on Wheels

Sailing Off Into the Sunset

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Choosing a Retirement Residence or a Nursing Home
is dedicated
to our children, Mike, Sue, Andrew
and their families,
including ten wonderful grandchildren.

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Introduction

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK is to help you consider your options, organize your thoughts and ask questions before making any decisions or commitments about the type of retirement residence or nursing home to which you or a loved one wish to downsize. Our goal is to provide you with information that can help you make your own more informed decisions. Whatever the choice, your goal is to have the best quality of life possible.

Please note that we are not providing legal advice. Given that laws vary from region to region concerning tax matters, real estate practices, elder care, estate organization and settlement, we strongly recommend that you consult the appropriate professional resource to advise you on your own situation, where applicable.

Choosing a Retirement Residence or a Nursing Home

MAJOR ADVANTAGES IN COMMUNITY living are: social interaction, proper food, housekeeping, supervised medical care, mental stimulation, physical safety and physical activities. People decide to move for a variety of reasons, and this will be reflected in the type of residence/long-term care facility they choose. With this in mind, start eliminating those places that can't or don't cater to your particular needs. We get many calls from seniors or family members who DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO. They don't know what options are out there and don't know where to begin. Fortunately, there are many services available that can help you make the best choice.

The sudden onset of serious health concerns can force a senior to take the first available retirement residence or long-term care facility. On the other hand, some people have the luxury of choosing where they will go. Continuing care retirement communities cover the entire spectrum, from independent condos or apartments to full-time nursing care. They offer units you can buy or apartments you can rent, one or two bedroom suites, rooms with kitchenettes, studios, assisted-living accommodations, and nursing home care. Some complexes offer "memory care" services and secure areas for people with various stages of Alzheimer's or other dementia. Unfortunately, few facilities offer this complete range of care as it is not as profitable.

"Luxury independent living" is being marketed in many cities. It's like living in a five-star resort with pool, spa, gourmet meals, wine cellar and available chauffeur. Residents pay for only the services they use. These "resorts" take only relatively healthy individuals looking for a care-free adult lifestyle. This policy is supported by those who enjoy good health and who are more likely to choose a residence where everyone else is healthy. A place full of wheelchairs can be daunting for someone who is not at that stage. When major health concerns are the main issue, many facilities can be eliminated as choices right away. Seniors have to realize that if they do need extra help down the road, they will need to hire outside services to come in on a regular basis and at an hourly rate.

Some independent apartments provide a few services, while others offer an amazing support system including meals, housekeeping, laundry services, nursing care, activities, bus trips, and even valet parking! Independent healthy active people may require no support, but the services are available, at extra cost, if health deteriorates. This avoids having to leave established friends and familiar surroundings when health concerns develop. A good choice for those who do have health concerns is a facility that offers progressive stages of assisted living such as medical care, extra supervision, and possibly even some help with eating, dressing and bathing.

Loneliness is a major incentive to move for aging people. It can be brought on by the loss of a mate, by friends or family members moving away, or by forced "hibernation" due to summer heat or the snows and ice storms of winter. People who are lonely should choose a place where there are planned activities, outings and a central area where people are encouraged to come and socialize. When residents want privacy or quiet, they can retire to the confines of their own suite yet socialize when so inclined. It's a win-win situation.

"Wanderers" with Alzheimer's or dementia need to live in a secure area where they are stimulated, treated with dignity and respect, and are able to go outside safely when the weather permits. Unfortunately, only a limited number of facilities offer this. Again, managers confide that they are simply not very profitable.

Are there nutrition and dietary concerns? Make sure the residence you have in mind is able to accommodate food sensitivities (e.g. low gluten or gluten-free, restricted salt, vegetarian and so forth).

Many seniors "don't do mornings." Do they have to go to the dining room for breakfast, or may they eat in their own suite? Can the staff bring them a tray of food? Is there an additional charge for this service? May they supply their own breakfast? Don't be shy. Ask lots of questions!

After the type of facility has been determined, you can begin to narrow down the choices. The majority of residences have websites providing information easily and quickly. Most are willing to mail information to you when you request it. Ask them to include floor plans, price lists, medical care availability, and a list of activities and services. Do your research!

Now check out the companies that own the residences you are considering. Do they have a good track record? Go online and see what you can find out about them. There are lots of large takeovers. If this a possibility, what would the implications be? One company we know of sold a residence and moved all the fragile seniors to another building. Guess what? They did this a second time and then a third time. The buildings were all repurposed and no longer served the seniors. This disruption for so many elderly people and their families caused much anxiety and resentment.

We find that the indecision of not knowing what to do can be quite exhausting, but the following should greatly assist your decision making. When you have narrowed down your choices to one or two places, it is important that you visit and eat a meal or two there. Most residences are quite happy to have you as their guest. It's also an opportunity to get a "feel" for the residence, people and staff. If you or your loved one doesn't like the food, then of course, nothing else is going to matter. If a resort-inspired retirement is desired, bear that in mind when you make your assessment.

A TOUR OF THE BUILDING

Usually, we see lots of women in the residences we work in. Recently, I was in a residence and noticed men, men, men. A friend called to say that she and her dad toured that particular building that very day. I mentioned that I had seen a lot of men and her reply was, "Yes, 46% of the residents are men." This was quite important to her dad.

As you go through, be sensitive to the following:

- Does the building seem clean and well maintained?
- Does staff show a caring attitude toward the seniors?
- Do the staff members work well with each other as a team?
- Do they seem helpful?
- Do the residents and staff seem welcoming and friendly?
- How do some of the residents feel about their "home"? Talk to some of them.
- Are there many visitors or volunteers around? If possible, talk with them to find out how they feel about the building and staff.
- All in all, is it a happy place?

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Does the residence have a good reputation?
- Is a health assessment necessary?
- Can the staff handle mild dementia? (This concerns either your parent or their possible neighbour.)
- What security features do they have in place?
- What happens if health deteriorates?
- Can they give extra care for a fee?
- Can you pay for a private caregiver?
- Can they insist that you (or a parent) move if health deteriorates or behavior becomes inappropriate? If so, how much notice will you be given?
- If they are hospitalized, is their monthly rate reduced?
- If they die, how long must you pay for the suite? How much time do you have to empty the suite, either at no charge or at charge?

- Are they willing to customize the suite to meet needs or desires?
- Is there a cost to do this?
- Will they provide furniture? What would the charge be?
- How are rooms heated and/or cooled? Some residences do not provide air conditioning but instead allow for open windows. If so, what is the room's sun exposure? Can residents install their own air conditioning units/space heaters? If so, is there an additional electrical charge?
- Is a cat permitted?
- Is a dog permitted?
- Is a bird permitted?
- Is the Internet available (phone, cable or wireless)?
- Is there user-friendly technology that allows video conferencing with family members?
- Is cable provided free?
- Do you have to use their phone and/or long distance provider?
- Are there daily activities?
- Is there an activity bus? Is it senior-friendly?

In speaking with clients, they mentioned there were several empty suites in the retirement residence they were considering. "Yes," I replied. "Many people are waiting too long to move and need extra care within a year. If they had moved sooner, they would have enjoyed a better quality of life for that much longer."

IMPORTANT FEATURES OR AMENITIES

- Is nursing care available?
- Is "memory care" available (if needed down the road)?
- Are there sufficient elevators in good condition?
- Are there well-marked, unlocked fire escapes, and how many?
- Is management on-site twenty-four hours per day?
- Is there front desk reception during the day?
- Are there security cameras?
- Is there a full generator backup for power failures?
- Are wheelchairs permitted?

- Are walkers permitted?
- Are scooters permitted?
- May scooters be "parked" in the corridors?
- Is oxygen therapy permitted?
- Is there a warm, inviting entrance?
- Is the dining room attractive?
- Is there a private dining area for family functions?
- Are the lounges and sitting areas inviting and being used by the residents?
- Is smoking permitted? If so, where?
- Is it a location or building where a cell phone will work?

ADDITIONAL AMENITIES TO CONSIDER:

There may be items on this list that are important to you. Keep them in mind as you do your research:

- Twenty-four hour concierge
- Valet parking
- Library
- Activity room
- Craft room
- Full kitchen that residents can use
- Fireplace
- TV room
- Large-screen theater
- Workshop
- Esthetician
- Beauty salon
- Tuck shop
- Resident laundry facilities
- Wet bar
- Wine cellar
- Pub
- Piano lounge

- Pool table
- Fitness room
- Swimming pool
- Outdoor patio or garden
- Private patio
- Bright atrium
- A greenhouse
- Chapel
- Storage for seasonal clothing
- Resident storage (in unit or building)
- Air conditioning
- Accessible parking
- Wheelchair accessible entrances/exits
- Fire and smoke alarms
- Sprinkler system

When we move people into a residence, there are occasions when many family members join their parents in the private dining area to have lunch or supper together.

May a toaster, kettle or coffeemaker be used in the room? We are finding that many residences are saying "NO TOASTERS." One morning we realized why. While moving in a client, we heard bells sounding in the hallways and sirens outside. We looked out the window just as two fire trucks arrived. When we could finally open the door to the hall, the smell of burnt toast was everywhere! The staff later told us they'd had three incidents of "burnt toast" that month. Most cities now charge seniors' residences after the first incident requiring emergency services.

Is the residence flexible enough to allow for an individual's lifelong habits? A friend likes her own pot of hot tea with a tea cozy. At each meal, they bring her the small tea pot and she puts her tea cozy on it. Some bring sugar-free jam for their toast. Others enjoy a glass of wine with their dinner. The senior provides the wine and the staff graciously pours it for them.

SERVICES PROVIDED

When you speak with the management, have this list handy and keep track of the answers that are important to you (or your parent):

- Number of meals daily
- Number of snacks daily
- Special diets accommodated
- In-room tray service
- Twenty-four-hour nursing
- Call button
- Doctor on call
- Lab services available
- Pharmacy services available
- Physiotherapy available
- Supervision of medication
- Housekeeping (weekly)
- Housekeeping (daily)
- Laundry services (linen)
- Laundry services (personal)
- Dry cleaning services
- Alterations available
- On-site banking
- Recreation programs
- Activity director
- Accessible minibus available for outings
- Transportation for medical appointments (is there a charge?)
- Weekly religious services or visitation
- Other

COSTS

- What is the basic monthly rate?
- How much extra is it for two people to share a suite?

- What were the rate increases over the last two years?
- Do you pay for only the services you use? Can you save by making up your own bed and providing your own breakfast?
- What are the additional charges?
- What services can be purchased from a personal service provider?
- Cable TV
- Utilities
- Phone
- In-room tray service
- Help with baths
- Help with dressing
- Assistance with ambulation (getting around)
- Setting off the fire alarm (burnt toast)
- Guest meals
- Medication supervision
- Resident transportation
- Movie nights
- Beauty salon
- Escort to meals
- Minor services (putting up a picture)
- Foot care

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Are there any tax credits?
- Do you sign a contract?
- May you keep a copy of it?
- How much notice needs to be given if you (or your parent) want or need to move?
- How quickly must the suite be emptied in the event of a death?
- What are the charges after death?
- Do you (or your parent) get a discount if away on vacation?
- Can you sublet your furnished suite for the winter?

- Do you (or your parent) get a discount if in the hospital?
- Are you allowed to let someone use the room (and services) if you are away?
- Can a family member stay in the suite for a few nights? Is there a cost?
- Is there a furnished suite for a visiting family member? Is there a cost?
- Could you have a sample menu, a newsletter or activity calendar?

IF YOU ARE FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO HAVE THE CHOICE OF A PARTICULAR ROOM OR SUITE:

- Is the morning or afternoon sun preferred?
- Would the preferred view be a busy street or a quiet garden?
- Is it important to bring a specific piece of furniture (e.g. piano, china cabinet, large bed)?
- Is it better to be closer (less distance) or farther from the elevator (noise)?
- Is indoor parking needed?
- Are activities for visiting grandchildren a consideration?

CHECKING OUT A SUITE

We always ask people, "How do you want to live in your room or in your suite?" Some people go to their room to be alone while others really want to have friends or family members spend time in their living quarters. They want the people from their card club or book club to be able to have a simple refreshment with them. They may serve cheese and wine or coffee and dessert. Others want family to come and share a pizza or grandchildren to come and play Scrabble® or Monopoly.

When one knows how they want to use their space, it is easier to choose the suite that suits them best and the items they wish to bring.

SOME THINGS TO LOOK AT

- Keyless entry (some clients with wheelchairs may need an automatic door opener)
- Suitable size entry for walkers and wheel chairs

- Enough space to use a walker or wheel chair in the suite, if needed
- Space to bring the things that matter most. (You can usually bring anything but not everything.)
- Suitable layout
- Individual temperature control
- Controls for heat and air conditioning
- Sufficient cupboard space
- Sufficient shelves in cupboards at appropriate height
- Permission to decorate (paint or put up a border)
- Window coverings supplied
- A fireplace
- Wood floors
- Clean carpets
- Balcony
- Patio
- In-room safe
- A small fridge supplied (some seniors want a freezer for ice cream or ice cubes)
- A microwave supplied
- Flat-screen TV

These lists can help you remember some important details:

LIVING AREA

- Is there room for a sofa, love seat, chairs?
- Electrical outlets – where and how many?
- What is the best spot for the television?
- Where will phones go?
- Who orders the cable?
- Are there overhead lights?
- Is there wall space for pictures?
- Is there space for a china cabinet, buffet or computer desk?
- Will there be room to use a walker?

- Is there a place to park a walker?
- Other questions

BEDROOM AREA

- What size bed will fit?
- What is the best place for a bed?
- Do you need to supply sheets? Blankets?
- Is there room for a chair?
- Where would the television go?
- Are there overhead lights?
- Where does the phone go?
- Is there room for a desk?
- Is there room for a computer?
- Who is the Internet provider?
- Is the Internet free in each suite?
- How much cupboard space is there?
- Are there shelves in the cupboards?
- Is there wall space for pictures?
- Are the window coverings supplied?
- Are the window coverings adequate?
- Electrical outlets: Where? How many?
- Other questions

KITCHENETTE

- Are the cupboards accessible for a senior?
- Is there a sink?
- Is there counter space?
- Are there drawers?
- Is a fridge supplied? If not, is there space for one?
- Is a microwave supplied? If not, is there space for one?
- Are there accessible electrical outlets? Where are they?
- Is the lighting sufficient?
- Is there room for a small table and chairs?

- May a toaster or toaster oven be used in the suite?
- Other questions

BATHROOM

- Can a walker or wheelchair get into the bathroom?
- Is there a call button?
- Is the lighting sufficient?
- Are there grab bars?
- Is there a tub or shower? (If there is a tub and you want a shower, inquire about a cut-out tub. They may do this for you or allow you to do it at your own expense.)
- Do you need to provide a shower curtain?
- Is a rubber mat needed for the tub or shower?
- Do you need to supply a bath seat?
- Are there enough towel bars?
- Do you supply the towels?
- Do you supply the toilet paper?
- How much cupboard space is there?
- Are there drawers?
- Is there room for a laundry hamper?
- Is there room for extra cupboard space or shelving?
- Are the cupboard door handles senior-friendly?
- Is there a hook on the back of the door?
- Is the bathroom shared with an adjoining unit? Who is in that unit?
- Other questions

BALCONY

- Is it easily accessible (e.g. is there a step?)
- Is it covered overhead?
- What is the walking surface?
- Will it take two chairs?
- Will it take a table?
- Is there room for plants?

- Is the door to the balcony secure?
- Are the railings secure? Are they see-through?
- May you use a large umbrella on the balcony?
- May you put carpeting on the balcony?
- Are birds or squirrels a nuisance on the balcony?
- Other questions

WINDOW COVERINGS

- Are they supplied?
- Can blinds be installed?
- Can a valance be put up?
- Other questions

DECORATING

- Can the color of paint be chosen?
- Can wallpaper be hung?
- Can a border be hung?
- Is there a choice in the floor covering?
- Can blinds be installed?
- Can a valance be installed?
- Can a more suitable toilet be installed?
- Can extra towel bars be installed?
- May shelving be installed?
- May "assist" poles be installed?
- Other questions

PETS

- Are pets permitted to live in the suite?
- Are pets permitted in the suite?
- Are seeing-eye dogs permitted?
- Is there a "resident pet" in the building?
- Is there room for a pet and pet supplies?
- Can you pay someone to help with pet care if needed?

- Other questions

SUGGESTED ITEMS TO HAVE IN A KITCHENETTE

- Coffee
- Coffee maker
- Tea
- Kettle
- Sugar
- Sugar substitute
- Salt and pepper
- Sugar bowl
- Mugs
- Juice
- Canned drinks
- Forks
- Spoons
- Knives
- Cutting knives
- Glasses
- Wine glasses
- Corkscrew
- Plates
- Dessert plates
- Cake plate
- Bowls
- Placemats
- Toaster oven
- Toaster
- Can opener
- Cutting board
- Small tray
- Placemats
- Dishtowels

- Dish detergent
- Plastic wrap
- Wax paper
- Tin foil
- Baggies
- Storage containers
- Ice cube trays
- Flower vases
- Vitamins
- Cereal
- Milk
- Jam
- Cookies
- Cookie tin
- Crackers
- Other items

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

- A kettle or coffee-maker that turns off automatically.
- No candles. (One forgetful person can affect a hundred lives.)
- No bleach. (One drop on the carpet can necessitate replacing the whole thing.)
- No frayed cords on old lamps. (Replace the cord if you insist on keeping the lamp.)
- Bookshelves attached to the wall.
- No area rugs on carpets (in most cases).
- Furniture arranged so no sharp corners are sticking out.
- No sharp objects placed carelessly in drawers.
- Handrails in bathroom (if needed).
- No glass in bathroom (you can get nice plastic cups).
- A night light for the bathroom.

FROM OUR FILES (*experience: the best teacher)

A lady called us about moving her. We had moved the couple several years before from a very large, expensive home to a large, high-priced suite in a retirement residence. She really didn't want to move but knew she had to because she had become a widow, had spent most of the money they had received from the sale of their home, and needed to cut back on monthly expenses.

People are living longer, and we see lots of seniors who have "outlived" their money. They had moved to the largest suite in the most expensive residence, then realized those "extra years" were draining their finances. Many tell us they never expected to live so long! Why not choose a more modest place that you can stay in indefinitely? Some clever individuals rent the smallest room in an expensive, up-scale residence with lots of extra perks. They don't plan to spend much time in it anyway!

We visited a charming ninety-year-old lady who lived in a very tiny and very full room. Her day bed was custom built so there was lots of storage under it. She had a corner cabinet and armoire, a computer, three small chairs, lots of pictures and plants, and her "precious things." Her room was reasonable and welcoming. It was her own little castle! It was home.

We have been asked, "What is the most number of moves we have made for a client?" The answer is EIGHT! Do your homework and make informed decisions that will work best for you or your loved ones.

Seniors are losing control of so much: their eyesight, hearing, independence, friends, pets, driving license, bladder... **THEY STILL WANT TO BE IN CONTROL!** As much as their situation allows, give them the opportunities to be involved in the decision-making process. Narrow the decisions down so it's not so overwhelming, but give them choices when you can. For example, "Mom, you CAN bring your large bed. Or you can bring a smaller bed and have room for your desk (or a chair, or extra dresser)." Try not to make it too complicated.

We always look at SAFETY. If a parent really wants to bring a pedestal eating table, we would say, "As seniors, we often use our arm muscles to get up. It's not safe for your **friends**, so let's get a safer table with four legs."

Remember that any move should improve one's quality of life.

For extra nursing care and more supervised help with daily living, many people will choose a nursing home or long-term care facility.

Several years ago we received a call from the hospital informing us that Doug's mom was being discharged and we were to pick her up by 10 a.m. We knew she couldn't go home, and picking her up meant bringing her to our home and placing her way down on "the waiting list" for care facilities. We had tried looking after her before and found ourselves to be totally ill-equipped.

Our reply was, "If you have a placement for her, we will pick her up and take her there, but if there isn't one available, then we will wait until there is." They quickly found a spot for her!

A nursing home is a place where health care services and help with daily living are provided. More care is provided than the senior can easily and reasonably get at home or in most retirement residences.

Each nursing home is different. Some are beautiful and new while others are very old and at times quite smelly! Some are warm, inviting and friendly, while others seem cold and intimidating. Most have private rooms, but others have two, three and even four sharing one room. (One would hope that the food wasn't too gaseous!) There are rooms with a private bathroom, while in many places there is a shared bathroom. Some have government financial aid and some don't. Some require a deposit to keep a room available.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AS YOU BEGIN YOUR SEARCH FOR A NURSING HOME

Many seniors are moving to be near family members. A recent survey showed that the main reason was to make life easier for their children to provide support when needed. Often there had been at least one trip to the hospital which involved TIME off work to be with a parent.

LOCATION

Often friends have asked us about residences or nursing homes for their parents. If the facility is near them or on their daily route to work or school, it is easier to pop in and see them or pick them up and bring them home for dinner. A friend's son stopped by his grandfather's room frequently to play cards with his grandpa. If the location is forty-five minutes away or longer, you have to make special plans to visit. So be sure to assess the following:

- Convenience
- A safe community
- Accessible for visitors
- Near public transportation
- Parking for visitors (free or reasonable)
- Near shopping, place of worship, medical offices

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

- Welcoming
- Clean
- Well lit
- Well maintained
- Attractive
- Homey
- Fresh smelling but not from heavy chemicals concealing the smell of urine. (You might smell urine near some rooms, but it shouldn't be the dominant smell in the building.)

THE GROUNDS

- Are they well maintained?
- Is there a place to walk?
- Are there places to sit?
- Are they secure?
- Are they safe?
- Are they accessible in the daytime only?
- Are they accessible in good weather only?

- Is smoking permitted in this area?

RESIDENTS (positive and negative impressions)

Ask residents if they have any complaints.

Determine if most of the residents are:

- Content
- Clean
- Well groomed
- Restrained
- Involved
- Peaceful
- Solitary in rooms
- Sitting slumped in a chair sleeping (lack of stimulation)
- Pleased with the place
- Wearing appropriate clothing for the season
- Interacting with other seniors
- Interacting with staff
- Screaming (can be unsettling)
- Moaning
- Other impressions

STAFF OBSERVATIONS

- Friendly
- Cheerful
- Able to communicate efficiently to seniors
- Treat residents with respect
- Seem to "care" about residents
- Get along with each other
- Neat and well groomed
- Ratio in the daytime
- Ratio at night

- Other observations

SAFETY

- Entrance wheelchair or walker-friendly (doors that open easily and stay open long enough for the senior to navigate through)
- Security system to control people entering or leaving the building
- Fire sprinkler system
- Fire doors
- Smoke alarms
- Carbon monoxide alarms
- Well-marked exits
- Hallways clear and uncluttered
- Grab bars in hallways and bathrooms
- Good lighting
- Elevators that are wheelchair or walker-friendly
- Sufficient elevators in good working condition
- Elevators with large, easily read operating buttons
- Emergency call buttons or cords near beds and in all bathrooms
- An emergency evacuation plan in place
- Locked exit doors that would be automatically released by a fire alarm. Also a code that any staff member could use to open a locked door.
- Other considerations

HEALTH CARE

- Is there a nurse on duty twenty-four hours per day?
- Can the senior keep his/her own doctor?
- Is there a doctor on call?
- Does the resident physician make regular visits?
- Is there a charge to give out medications? How much?
- Is foot care available? Cost?
- Is physiotherapy available? Cost?
- Is speech therapy available? Cost?
- Is hydrotherapy available? Cost?

- Is there a restorative care program? Cost?
- Is there a program for stimulation of people with memory loss?
- Other considerations

THE ROOM: Features

In some locations, people are offered the choice of ONE ROOM with literally hours to decide whether they will accept it or not. Some offers come through government agencies and some facilities are privately owned and can offer more options for a fee.

- Private room
- Shared room
- Private bathroom with shower
- Private bathroom without shower
- Shared bathroom
- Storage place in bathroom
- Is a bed provided?
- Is other furniture provided?
- Wheel-chair friendly
- Adequate lighting
- Connection for phone
- Connection for cable
- Room temperature controllable
- Air conditioning for summer
- A lockable drawer or safe

THE ROOM: Questions and Considerations

- What personal furniture may the resident bring?
- What storage is available in the room?
- Is there extra storage available in the building?
- May the resident use his/her own sheets? If yes, who will wash them?
- How is privacy guarded from wanderers?
- Must the resident's clothes be labelled?

- Does the facility prefer to label the clothing?
- Can the resident put up pictures?
- Does the nursing home prefer to put up pictures? At what cost? Sometimes when we move seniors, we are not permitted to put up pictures yet feel that doing so would help make the transition easier.
- Does the maintenance staff need to check all electrical cords before you can plug them in?
- Other

FOOD

Food and mealtimes are often the highlight of the day, so this section merits careful attention.

One of our senior men loved making bread. He brought his bread maker, yeast, flour, etc and had a small fridge in his room. He delighted in sharing a variety of home-made breads with people in the nursing home.

- Is there a dietician on staff?
- Is the kitchen inspected regularly by the health department?
- Is there choice and variety in the meals?
- Is the home able to accommodate special diets (e.g. vegetarian, lactose-intolerant, heart-healthy, diabetes, Kosher, no eggs, no wheat etc.)?
- Are there three meals a day? Ask to see a typical menu.
- Are there three snacks a day? What typical snacks are served? When and where?
- Are the dining areas pleasant?
- Are the tables inviting?
- Do the meals look appetizing?
- Are seats at the tables assigned? If so, do they try and put compatible people together?
- Is there a private dining area (for family or guests)?
- Can a visitor stay for a meal? At what cost? How much notice needs to be given?
- Can the resident have food in the room?

- May the resident have dishes or glasses in the room? If yes, must they be plastic or disposable?
- Can the resident have a fridge in the room?
- Can food be brought in (his/her favorite Chinese food or a birthday cake)?
- Is help provided to get to the dining room if needed? Cost?
- Is help provided with feeding if needed? Cost?
- Is alcohol permitted in the room?
- Other considerations

VISITORS

When Judy's grandmother had a stroke and landed in a nursing home, she didn't want to see anyone. The truth was she didn't want anyone to see how much she had deteriorated. **Counselling was needed.**

We often say, "It's important to keep some OLD friends and to make new ones." Some seniors have invited friends for wine and cheese in their nursing home room. One wonderful lady brought a lot of her craft materials (with permission) and started craft classes for the residents. It gave her purpose and helped brighten the outlook of many others. Some have young students come and "read" to them. Some ask family members to bring a pet which visits with many people and becomes everyone's friend while there.

- Is there a social worker on staff?
- What are visiting hours?
- Are visitors or family members invited to be involved in any of the activities? Judy's grandmother came from a family of bakers. One Christmas, we carefully made light and dark fruit cake, shortbread and gingerbread people. (We used no nuts.) Each was individually wrapped, then placed at each senior's place for Christmas dinner – courtesy of Grandma!
- Is there a family council? If so, how often does it meet?
- Are families able to voice their concerns? How?
- Can residents be taken for outings?
- May grandchildren visit?
- May pets visit (if well behaved)?

ACTIVITIES

- Is there an activity director?
- Is there an activity room?
- What are the weekly activities?
- What are the special activities?
- Are the daily or weekly activities posted?
- What exercise activities are encouraged?
- Is there a craft room?
- Do volunteers help with the activities?
- Are the seniors encouraged to be involved in the activities?
- Are there activities that stimulate the mind?
- Are the seniors encouraged to help with some of the activities? Some seniors help with the weekly Bingo games. Judy's aunt loved horse racing and set a "course" in the activity room. One of the seniors rolled the dice and called the numbers.
- Is there an activity bus for outings? Is it wheel-chair friendly?
- Are there activities that meet physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs?
- Are seniors permitted to use their cooking skills and make cookies or muffins?
- Are there times for card games?
- Is group singing encouraged?
- Is there a piano or organ? Are seniors permitted to use it anytime?
- Is there a library?
- Is there a chapel? Is it open twenty-four hours?
- Is there an area for movies?
- Is there a computer available for the seniors to use?
- Can someone help a resident send an e-mail to a loved one?
- Other activities

INFORMATION THAT MAY BE REQUIRED

- A medical form filled out by a doctor.

- Financial statements showing the ability to meet the commitments or entitlement to government assistance.
- Personal information on power of attorney for care and finances, next of kin, etc.

THE CONTRACT

Ask to see a copy of the contract. Some of our clients have asked their lawyer to look over the contract. Is a deposit needed to hold the room? How much is it, and what does it cover? For how long will they hold a room? Are there any incentives to move in within forty-eight hours?

- What are the costs?
- What is covered?
- What is not covered?
- When are payments due?
- Is it a month-to-month agreement?
- How often can the rates go up?
- What is the responsibility of the resident?
- What are the rights of the residents?
- Are subsidies available?
- Will the home help relocate a resident to another room, floor or residence? (At times, some moves are necessitated because of Alzheimers' disease, growing bad temper or a deteriorating physical condition.) What is the cost?
- If the senior is in the hospital for an extended time, can his/her room be given to someone else?
- Is a monthly statement provided?
- If the senior dies, what is the financial commitment to the nursing home?
- If the senior dies, how soon after does the room need to be emptied?
- If items are left in the room after the death of a senior, what will the charges be?
- Is there a base charge for damage to the room? Cost?
- Is there a charge for repairing holes in walls due to installed furniture that has been removed?

NOTE: Your final choice will be a facility that comes closest to meeting all expectations with as few "downsides" as possible. Frequently, there is little time to decide whether to accept it when a room becomes available.

THE ROOM – MAKING "FOUR WALLS" MORE LIKE HOME!

The reality is that there are many elderly people in hospitals waiting to be discharged into long-term care. They won't be going home! Another reality is that when a space is available, it will often be little more than four walls, a hospital bed, and maybe an institutional chair and/or dresser.

How sad! Even sadder is the fact that many elders seem ready to accept this. In fact, when help is first offered, some are quite insistent that you do nothing. We see this attitude reflected in such scenarios as bringing their televisions and being told, "No! Take it away! I don't want it."

A day or two later, guess what? Back we go with the TV.

Incidents such as these add to the roller coaster of emotions that families often go through. The good news is that following this, the senior becomes a little more open to allowing you to add a few "touches" to the room. Your goal, of course, is to make it more like home.

Before proceeding, it should be noted that if you are fortunate enough to have some lead time, the following suggestions can be implemented before the senior arrives. Then his/her first impression has more of a chance of being positive rather than negative.

In our experience, the first things the resident should see are familiar, comfort-giving things on the walls and elsewhere, such as pictures of family, friends, pets, holidays, awards, medals, special certificates, etc. Along with the comfort factor, it gives the care staff topics for some friendly chit-chat.

One July day, Judy had a call from an only daughter who was working in the United Arab Emirates. Her mom was being discharged from a hospital to a nursing home the next day and she asked us to help.

When Judy arrived at the nursing home, there was mom in her winter coat and she was GOING HOME!! The question asked was, "What was your career?" She had worked with veterans, as had Doug's dad. She had worked with him! She took off her coat and pitched in to help get the room set up. Often people with dementia can carry on great conversations about a pet, a career, a holiday...

AS FOR THE ROOM IN GENERAL, STAND BACK AND HAVE A GOOD LOOK.

- May you move the bed to open up more useable space?
- How much wall space is there?
- Where will the television go? Can it be mounted on the wall?
- Is there room for a curio cabinet or bookcase? (Some places do not permit glass of any kind. Many places insist that book shelves be screwed to the wall for safety.)
- Could you bring a "reading" machine, a favorite chair, an extra chair for a visitor, a small fridge, a filing cabinet?
- Can he/she bring a computer? Is the Internet available in the room?

SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER BRINGING

- A favorite comforter or bedspread
- Their own pillows
- An afghan
- A cookie tin
- A coffee mug
- A flower vase
- Books or magazines
- Playing cards
- Photo albums
- Bulletin board
- Calendar
- Magnifying glass
- A stuffed animal
- A night light for the bathroom

- Other

If your loved one has dementia and wants to bring some things that are valuable, then put them in a locked cabinet. When you visit, you can reassure them that the items are still there and haven't been stolen or become lost. Some places allow you to bring a glass cabinet, while other places permit absolutely no glass. Check before you move mirrors or pictures with glass.

(Note: Mirrors can cause Alzheimers' patients to claim there is a stranger in their room. They, of course, are that stranger. They only recall the youthful person they once were.)

"Will I be happy?" is a question we are often asked. My reply: "It is a choice." **Whatever you decide to do, the end result should be a warmer, homier and more familiar environment to help your loved one settle in.**



DOUG AND JUDY ROBINSON retired from teaching in 1992. At that time, they downsized. As the owners and managers of Senior Moves, they have been downsizing seniors since 1996. Over the years, they have been sharing their expertise on radio talk shows, national and local television, and through many live seminars near and far.

They have three children and ten wonderful grandchildren.

Visit their website at
downsizingforboomersandseniors.com.