



The Dynamics of Adult Day Health Care

by Joe Steckler, President
Helping Seniors of Brevard

Adult day health care is one of the most useful tools available to the caregiver of a frail senior or one who suffers from dementia. It serves both the care receiver and the caregiver. A person with dementia might not want to avail himself of adult daycare, but such service could be the only thing keeping him in his home and less of a financial or care burden on his family.

Adult daycare facilities are not created equal – some provide better care than others. Since many of us will need this type service for a loved one, it behooves us to become better informed. Two important things to understand are how adult daycare is funded and how potential customers pay for its use.

Adult daycares are businesses, just like clothing stores or car dealerships. Most facilities are privately run by small business owners, so the margin between profit and bankruptcy is slim. Many go out of business. Conversely, there is almost no government funding to assist in building them. In a country as wealthy as ours, this is a sad commentary on the prioritization of resources to aid an aging population.

The second part of the problem is how to pay for care. As facilities struggle for clients just to keep their doors open, the cost of daycare continues to increase. Some care is provided under long term care insurance and some through Medicaid funding, but the majority of clients are private pay. And, when the daily cost is in the neighborhood of \$70 per day, it becomes difficult for the average family to support.

The State of Florida has a program called the Alzheimer's Disease Initiative that gives every county money for Alzheimer's care. Generally speaking funds are awarded by contract to one provider per county, leaving the rest struggling to survive. State law requires that adult daycares hire certain types and numbers of care givers and have a nurse on call. Facilities have to be eye appealing and serve good food to attract customers. This all costs money.

There was a recent outcry to fund the Children's Services Council of Brevard through a new tax initiative largely promoted by our local United Way, which has already reprogrammed many of its resources to children's services. It is hard to fathom this continued emphasis on child care when we already have huge tax burdens in place at the national, state, and local levels to fund these programs. When will we promote care of the frail elderly? It is easy to say there are not enough dollars to go around, but I think the problem is deeper than that.

I helped build and manage three state of the art adult daycares in Melbourne, Titusville, and Micco. These beautiful facilities were a life saver to families in need, many times in distress. With the financial help provided by the state and other resources, we had the seed money to help families reduce the burden of five-day-a-week care to a point where they might pay for two or three days while we picked up the remainder. In effect, we stretched the care dollars.

This can still be done, but we must develop new dollars for this type care. If we can fund a million dollar initiative for children, why not have the county make seed money avail-

able for existing adult daycares in Brevard County, managing the fund through the Department of Housing and Human Services? Such a move makes good economic sense. Consider our choices: devote less than \$1,000 a month to help defray the cost of adult daycare for private clients, or pay \$8,000 a month to a nursing home using Medicaid funds. Premature institutionalization adds up to higher tax burdens.

I recently toured CRM Senior Day Center in Rockledge. While there I talked to a client, a retired Air Force Colonel, who had the finest praise for the staff and owners. The facility is beautiful, provides delicious food through Aging Matters, and is very accessible. Yet few know about or can afford this facility, which is licensed to provide care to 60 people daily. And, I can assure you that there are many people in Rockledge who need this care.

More of us need to understand the dynamics of the problem I have cited in this article. Senior advocacy is sadly lacking. Now there is a tendency to neglect, rather than care for our aging population. It is a problem that will increase, not decrease in magnitude. Development of local programs would be most beneficial, as would more information and education. This is the type of problem that our County Commissioners should place on the agenda for resolution. Call yours! Seniors do vote! **SS**

SUDOKU

By Linda Thistle

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DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ◆

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