



# Understanding Long Term Health Care

By Joe Steckler, *President, Helping Seniors of Brevard County*

This is a topic on which mountains could be written. To say that the Long Term Care (LTC) system is in a state of flux would be a mild understatement, as there is no care system in as much operating trouble as the one in place today. I am not a medical professional writing about the perceived needs of the LTC system; rather, I want to make people who will need this care aware of my own perceptions based on personal experience. As a nation faced with exceptional needs for LTC and explosive elder growth, our care system requires help now.

Regardless of how we have gotten ourselves into such a predicament, it will require a solution. Many people across our nation will be affected, therefore the solution must

address the care of millions of elderly, especially those who are frail and/or who require assistance with toileting, dressing, taking a bath, eating, etc. Speaking to Brevard County alone, we are already experiencing the problems of an aging community. FYI, the State of Florida has about 50,000 on the Medicaid waiting lists, a number that has not changed for many years.

Many of us have been in hospitals and remember the not so good food, but generally that experience only lasted a few days before we returned home. Consider a five-month stay in a rehabilitation center – receiving cold eggs every day or hot soup only once. Cold food can be tolerated, but how about poor chicken cuttings that cause bone slivers? Imagine pulling

the call cord for an urgent need such as a bowel movement or a partial fall from your bed and waiting 15, 30, or 60 minutes for help. These are real experiences that occur all the time, though you never hear about them.

There is a real lack of people willing to serve in facilities performing such care. How much money would you want to turn patients every few minutes and clean up after bowel movements? The majority of people who work in the industry do so for low wages, about \$10 an hour, and the work of the good aides is a labor of love. I learned a lot during my stays in this care environment and appreciate the job done by these mostly untrained members of the work force. I also value those aides who have ten people to get ready for the day and feed.

Since my recent care in several different facilities, I have some knowledge of what care should be like no matter where placed. Not all facilities are the same, but certain problems are shared by the majority of LTC facilities. Every facility can use the time a family can give once a member is placed. It is not an out of sight, out of mind program. The placed family member needs your help. In the not-so-recent past, these people we now place in a facility were cared for in the home, but societal

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