

Baby Boomers Will Change Nursing Home Care...For Better or Worse

By Karen Kallen-Zury, CEO Hollywood Hills Rehabilitation Center
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(HealthNewsDigest.com) - The Baby Boomer generation has had a profound effect on every aspect of our culture, and that trend will continue as the Boomers age – including significant changes in nursing home care.

If you have had any exposure to nursing homes, you know they have already changed dramatically. People used to enter nursing homes to stay for the remainder of their lives. Now these facilities are more commonly used for subacute care – someone enters the hospital to have a surgical procedure, enters a nursing home to recover and rehabilitate, and then leaves. Long-term residents are usually those who are disabled or suffer from dementia or Alzheimer's.

Most Boomers are at the age now where the primary concern is their parents, so they are learning about the options available. This is a generation that likes to do research, but when choosing a facility there is no substitute for spending time on site. The best research is to walk around, see how residents are taken care of. Note the attitudes, the smiles, the smells. You want to find a place that makes you feel comfortable. All the statistics in the world won't matter if you don't feel good when you walk in.

As it becomes time for Boomers themselves to make use of these facilities, they will be much more demanding than previous generations, which will drive further changes. It also will very likely set up a clash between what they want and what Medicaid and other programs are willing to pay for. More and more nursing home residents need Medicaid coverage, which indicates a great need for the government to stay involved and continue funding nursing homes.

A well-run nursing home can be a comfortable, nurturing place for an elderly person. One of the inescapable elements of quality of care is the staffing level of the nursing home. There is no way around it, caring for the elderly is a time-intensive service and study after study has shown that reducing staffing levels has a direct impact on quality of care.

In the coming years, it will become harder to meet the demands of an aging population. The aging Boomer population will put tremendous strain on nursing homes. Residents with dementia or Alzheimer's need even more care, with more intense staffing. Adequate care for our elderly population is a fundamental expense, one that is not going away. It will continue to be an issue until we find a better long-term Medicaid funding solution.

We may not like to think too much about it, but many of us – about one in four – will eventually receive care in a nursing home environment, either for rehabilitation or as a resident. Let's hope that the Boomer generation doesn't simply overload the system, but instead is the catalyst for positive change.

About the Author

Karen Kallen-Zury is CEO of Hollywood Hills Rehabilitation Center, a fully licensed, family-owned skilled nursing facility providing 24-hour individualized rehabilitation services and nursing care, accepting Medicare, Medicaid, most insurance.

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