

Memory care: Setting realistic expectations



Memory Care facilities are important parts of communities, helping to provide care and support as the population in the United States ages. The services they provide can vary depending on their focus – and their challenges can also be unique to their specialization.

Memory care facilities are designed and staffed to assist people with memory impairments, such as Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia. These facilities typically offer a higher level of supervision and support than other types of senior living communities, as individuals with cognitive impairments have specific needs. Additionally, memory care facilities often have a more structured schedule and routine. They may also have specialized activities and therapies designed to engage residents and help them maintain cognitive function.¹

Industry trends and market challenges can heavily affect memory care communities. Navigating these trends can help operators mitigate potential challenges and keep their senior population safe and well cared for. This is especially important, considering that the number of individuals with dementia is rising due to the aging Baby Boomer generation. In fact, more than 9 million Americans could have dementia by 2030 and nearly 12 million by 2040.² And the number of Alzheimer's disease cases is predicted to rise to an estimated 14 million people by 2060.³

Moving a resident from home to a memory care facility is usually initiated as a result of the home caregiver no longer being able to care for the resident safely, or the aftermath of an event, such as a fall. Often, family members consider the memory care community as a treatment to stop the progressive and fatal disease process. They believe the placement will result in an improvement of the disease. Even though memory care placement does not prevent the decline, often the family's point of view is any further decline is the fault of the memory care facility.

It is essential for the memory care community to disclose information about the level of services offered and set realistic expectations for the care at the facility. Failure to understand and manage the expectations of residents and family members can lead to conflicts, and ultimately litigation if clients fail to receive the anticipated services and care. It is very important that the residents and family members understand that their loved one will not be receiving the same 24-hour one-on-one care they received at home.

Placement of a family member in a memory care facility can be intimidating and overwhelming for both the resident and family members. The family members may also be experiencing guilt and anger over the inability to care for the resident in their home. The admission staff members should identify for the families the natural risks associated with age and the progression of their disease process. Such risks include:

- Increased risk of falls
- bruises/skin tears
- loss of appetite
- weight loss
- dehydration
- compromised skin
- contractures
- functional decline
- weakness

If the family does not have a clear and realistic understanding of these risks and the declines associated with the condition; the facility and staff will be perceived by the family as the reason for the decline. It is important to discuss the stages and the complications associated with each stage of the disease with the family members so the family may make informed decisions regarding their loved one's care.

Once the staff has set realistic expectations and educated the family members about the natural risks associated with the disease, an individualized plan of care should be initiated. The memory care staff should assess the resident on an ongoing basis and discuss when, in fact, there has been either a change or potential change in the resident's physical, mental or social condition.

Managing resident and family expectations takes time; however, setting realistic expectations and open communication will assist with managing the risk, and will foster a higher level of trust.



Providing solutions to help our members manage risk.SM

For your risk management and safety needs, contact Nationwide Loss Control Services at 1-866-808-2101 or LCS@nationwide.com.

¹ <https://www.memorycare.com/what-is-a-memory-care-facility/>

² <https://www.prb.org/resources/fact-sheet-u-s-dementia-trends/#:-:text=Estimates%20vary%2C%20but%20experts%20report,nearly%2012%20million%20by%202040>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/aging/publications/features/Alz-Greater-Risk.html>

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