

A Qualitative Perspective on the Consumer Search for an Assisted Living Facility

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Introduction

An important and relatively new housing option for older adults is the assisted living facility. Intended to bridge the gap between completely independent living and long-term care, the assisted living concept promotes the philosophy of personal control within a home-like group living arrangement. From a consumer perspective, there are a number of unanswered questions about the issues involved in the selection of an assisted living facility. An important one is whether the search for this housing option seems to more closely resemble the search for a nursing home or the process used for selecting a continuing care retirement community (CCRC).

Methodology

A focus group study was conducted with elderly residents of an assisted living facility in a midwestern state. The group was made up of nine Caucasian participants, four men and five women. Residents were targeted to participate in the study, with cognitively impaired residents eliminated by the site director. The focus group session lasted 1-1/2 hours, and participants were paid \$10. Sessions were recorded for later transcription. Working independently, the members of the research team used the grounded theory approach to analyze the data.

Focus Group Results and Implications

Theme 1: Consumer Search

Typically, assisted living facility rental agreements are on a month-to-month rental basis rather than a lease or purchase arrangement. In this study, the residents themselves perceived the month-to-month rental agreement in a positive way. For a number of the residents, the precipitating event that initiated the search for alternative elderly housing was a medical "event."

Adult children played a major role not only in the decision to move to an assisted living facility, but also in the selection process itself. For the most part, desire that the facility be near family members' homes limited the search among facilities.

Theme 2: Resident Satisfaction

Overall, residents seemed satisfied with living in their current arrangement. Residents pointed out that they liked the feeling of safety and security, and felt reassured that help was nearby if they needed it. They talked about how they were allowed to make choices about activities, social interaction, and services provided. If one defines satisfaction as the match between expectations and outcome, then one could posit that these residents were satisfied or highly satisfied with their choice.

The information here represents an exploratory attempt to identify issues surrounding the search for and satisfaction with assisted living. Additional research is needed to determine if the delivery of such services is perceived as positively in other assisted living facilities.

Endnotes

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