



# Assisted Life at Home

By Christine Eggers, Appeal to Heaven

**H**ave you ever been told a loved one cannot be discharged from a facility without 24/7 care? This news causes families to scramble to find the first facility with an open bed rather than taking the time to choose their best option. It causes fear, agitation, and anger in the moment and can lead to despair over the long-term if a loved one in failing health is residing a long distance away.

So, let's look at this. It's not actually true. No one can hold a person against their will except under arrest or guardianship. So, why do they say it? It's said out of concern for the safety of the patient and a belief that residential care is the only option. Often after a fall with injury, facility staff will not be able to think of any means of preventing future falls except the continuous observation and restricted activity they feel facilities offer.

Studies have shown that a person is often less likely to fall in his own home, due to the familiarity of surroundings and muscle memory. The reason? Old habits die hard, a resident in a facility may step in the expected direction to get to the bathroom, and then fall when he makes a sudden correction, causing him to lose his balance.

The most common cause of falls is "deconditioning." Deconditioning is the weakness associated with inactivity, weight loss from inadequate nutrition, and poor medication management. Deconditioning also leads to a cluttered environment when a person can't tidy up effectively, increasing the environmental risk of a tripping hazard and causing a fall with injury.

Assistance at home is both a long- and a short-term option. With the right assistance, many people can safely remain at home their entire lives. For others, assistance at home serves to buy time until the right residential care opportunity comes along.

Home health assistance may include any of the following services:

- **Personal Care**

- Bathing assistance
- Grooming
- Toileting

- **Supportive Care**

- Meal preparation
- Shopping
- Housekeeping
- Laundry
- Companionship
- Safety checks

- Transportation to non-medical appointments

- **Nursing Services**

- Medication management
- Health maintenance
- Supervision/training of personal cares
- Medical device management (e.g. catheter care)
- Chaperoned doctor appointments and schedule management
- Keeping family updated

For people who own their homes, it is a better use of their financial resources to pay for services only rather than services and accommodation. Only pay for what you need.

Just like assisted living, private home health assistance provides the RN supervision necessary to manage medications and monitor health to prevent decline in addition to all the personal and supportive services needed.

What about the safety checks? The fact is no one in a facility is continuously monitored 24 hours per day. They are alone in their apartments or rooms for hours between safety checks. They can be discovered after a fall in either location. In a facility a resident pays for staff to check on him at regular intervals. The same service can be provided at home.

What about unexpected needs between visits? Preventing those needs is part of the care service arrangement. In a facility, call light response time for unexpected needs is a common complaint—this is why the goal is to anticipate and prevent unexpected needs between planned visits.

All that said, a person with advanced dementia who cannot understand their risks of harm is not an ideal candidate for private home health care. Cognitive decline is the biggest obstacle to remaining at home. It's not impossible. But, quite often, a change in residence is necessary. A person who requires two-person assistance for frequent personal cares may also benefit from residential care. There are also those who would prefer to live where there are other people all the time.

When it comes to long term assistance, one size does not fit all. We are fortunate in our community to have affordable options for remaining at home, whether short- or long-term.

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