

KENDALL GAZETTE

Ask Helen



Mom Fears Moving

BY HELEN SHAHAM

Q. It took a year for my mother to finally get comfortable in an independent living community. Now at 83 years old, she has deteriorated to the point where she really needs assisted living, but she is frightened to move again. Can you give me some advice?

A. There are two elements at play here. First, change is difficult at any age, and becomes increasingly difficult as we get older. Familiar is comfortable. Change is scary. Your mother has settled into a routine, made new friends, and now faces the prospect of doing it all over again at age 83.

Second, there is the desperate feeling that she is deteriorating. Each new move is one step closer to the end, and therefore must be fought at all costs.

At the Palace, we try to make the transition easier by offering the full continuum of care on our Kendall campus. We have the Palace Suites for those who can live independently but just want the security and comfort of having everything done for them, so they can just relax and enjoy their lives. Next is the Palace Royale, what we call “catered living”, for seniors who need assistance but are still mentally sharp. Then there is the Palace Renaissance, a traditional assisted living community for those who need a great deal of physical assistance or who have mental impairments such as Alzheimers or

Dementia. The fourth building, the Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, offers both skilled nursing care and a rehabilitation program where people with injuries or strokes may recover and get back to their lives.

The idea is that people can move from building to building as needed, always staying on the same campus, in familiar surroundings, so transition is easier. After all, when the time comes to move, you are just moving Next Door!

But we find that moving next door provokes the same feelings of terror in residents as if the building was 100 miles away. Physical proximity doesn't matter much to them. What's important to them is that moving means leaving friends behind, and is an admission of physical or mental deterioration.

We have done focus groups with the residents to explore ways of overcoming the problem, and they've had good suggestions. (They usually do have good suggestions. When you live to be 80 or 90 you learn a few things!)

As a result of the focus groups, we now offer scheduled tours of the other buildings to any residents who are interested, well before they need to consider moving. We now have a golf cart shuttle going from building to building so people can visit their old friends after moving, perhaps even keep up their card games together. Even though the buildings are on the same campus, it can be a long walk if you're 85!

We can do all of this because the buildings are on the same campus – a continuum of care – and because we control the situation. That's a big advantage over what's generally available elsewhere.

Now, back to your mother. Let her know you understand her fears and relate to them. Try everything you can to help her set them aside. Maybe the assisted living residence

you're considering can offer to have your mother as a guest for a few days, so she can see what it's like. – that it's not so bad or so different – before she actually gives up her home in the independent living community.

As with many of our residents, your mother may have resisted moving to the independent living community originally because she feared that she would give up her independence. Then she probably was surprised to find that she actually gained independence by moving in. With meals provided, transportation and entertainment, maintenance and utilities, and friends across the hall, the life she was losing by living alone was restored.

Let her know that by moving to assisted living community, she once again will find her independence restored. She will get the help she needs to live life to its fullest. Good luck!

Helen Shaham and her husband Jacob have been operating retirement communities for nearly 30 years. The Palace Suites in Kendall is a luxury Independent Living Community for active seniors. In addition, The Palace at Kendall campus is home to two Assisted Living Residences and a Nursing & Rehab Center. They also operate The Palace Gardens Assisted Living Community in Homestead, Homestead Manor Nursing Home and The Palace @ Home, a Medicare Certified Home Health Agency. Their two newest projects are The Palace at Weston – luxury living for those 55 and over, and The Palace Tel-Aviv, a continuing care retirement community in Israel. They have two communities under development – The Palace at Weston Senior Living and The Palace at Coral Gables. More information can be found on the company website, www.thepalace.org or by calling 305-270-7000.