

RISK, REWARD, AND REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS



Have you ever wondered why families or residents seem frustrated with care? Do you find yourself in damage control mode over situations that have become exaggerated?

A big piece of partnering with residents and families includes helping them establish realistic expectations. The transition to extended care and living in a community setting is a big one. The earlier expectations of all parties can be shared the better the benefit of higher satisfaction and lower risk.

Let's explore 5 realities for the long-term care transition



REALITY 1: NOT 24 HR 1:1 CARE

A community living environment does not replace an individual home, but can provide resources not available in a home setting. One of the biggest advantages is being cared for by trained and experienced caregivers who are coordinated by professional management. It's one of the primary reasons most families need long term care.

1:1 care at home does not guarantee a zero-risk environment with no incidents. Important questions for families to consider include:

- What exactly does our family need?
- Where can it be provided and what level is needed?
- What options most closely fit our needs?

It's good to give families the freedom to answer these questions while giving them professional insight into the advantages of community options.

REALITY 2: RESPONSE TIMES

Families and residents need to understand proactively that staff and caregivers are available for most needs, but those are not always met immediately. Reviewing staffing patterns and requirements helps families understand that 1:1 bedside care is not a realistic expectation.

This is also a good time to discuss the advantages of having leadership in place to manage, schedule, and train caregivers. A community environment takes on the responsibility of caregiver management for families.

Providing understanding and reasoning for staffing patterns and response times helps families appreciate the advantages of a professional care team.



REALITY 3: DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NEEDS & WANTS

The reality that immediate responses are not always achievable leads to the reality of determining between needs and wants.

It is important to identify the difference in a call for assistance asking questions on the day's schedule, opening a juice carton, or assistance with dressing vs a fall or high-risk safety situation. It's also vital to identify how staff proactively meet those personal preferences to avoid those wants not being met.

Preferences and wants deserve priority and attention but some will naturally have higher priorities. A good example would be the necessity to first attend to a resident who has fallen in place of the planned task of assisting another resident with their breakfast tray.

Always consider patience vs. seeking/demanding answers. Working together with families in understanding a situation always brings better results. The reality is it is not possible to have every want of every resident met at the same moment. Walking through this with families helps give realistic expectations and understanding.

REALITY 4: AGING CAN BE COMPLEX

Our society often lives in denial of the realities of aging, or want an immediate fix to growing older.

All diagnosis, all difficulties, all problems with aging are not fixable.

All things that can happen at home can happen in a group or community living, and vice versa. As professionals in long term care and aging services it is important to educate families on their individual situations and realistic outcomes.

The goal is to maintain functioning as high of level as possible. The reality is that decline will often occur, and more support may be needed. Encourage families to surround themselves with trusted resources and support during these transitions.



REALITY 5: COMMUNICATION IS ESSENTIAL

Choose to communicate. Always.

Decide to Assume Nothing and Always Seek Understanding of the Issue

Maintaining mutual respect with communication and understanding is key to success. It promotes working together for the good of the residents, with an approach to understanding the issues, processes, and desires for the same goal. The more proactive the communication the better.

Encourage families to partner with the caregiver team

The issues surrounding transitions into long-term care are complex and difficult at best. Helping families understand the realistic dynamics of care benefits everyone's interest and is a tremendous service to all involved.