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Long-term Care Systems

There are over 6 million people in the United States who are age 65 or older and need long-term support services (AARP 2004). 38.9% of Texans over age 60 have at least one disabling condition (Texas Department on Aging, 2003). The majority of care is received from family and friends or in combination of informal/unpaid and formal/paid service. Several types of long-term care systems, offering different levels of assistance, are available. The Mayo Clinic (2004) has presented a list and explanation of these services:

1. Home care encompasses a flexible range of services provided for people in the comfort of their homes. Aides assist with meals, baths, housekeeping, and groceries; nurses provide medical care.
2. Adult care service (also known as adult day service) provides social interaction, meals activities, and occasional medical services at a specific location in the community during the regular working hours.
3. Senior housing (such as a retirement home) is tailored for seniors who cannot live in their own home but do not need continuous care.
4. Assisted living is similar to senior housing; however, staff is also available to help with medications, personal care, and some medical care.
5. Nursing homes are for people recovering from an illness or injury and need 24-hour nurse or end-of-life care. Personal care is also offered.

Adult Day Services

Adult day services provide care for “functionally and/or cognitively impaired adults,” through “a variety of health, social, and other related support services in a protective setting during any part of a day, but less than 24-hour care” (National Adult Day Services Association, 2005). General operation is 5 days a week during business hours. Some adult day services have extended and weekend hours. A very small percentage of centers provide overnight care.

In a national study of adult day centers, Partners in Caregiving (2002) reported that 60% of participants were Medicaid-eligible or had an annual income at or below the federal poverty level. The average age of participants was 72. The conditions of participants typically included: 52% with dementia, 41% frail elderly, 24% with mental retardation/developmental disability, and 23% with physical disability/cognitive competence. The remaining conditions were chronic mental illness, HIV/AIDS, and brain injury.

Adult day center services vary widely, and some services may be contracted out or require an additional fee. Possible services available are (PIC, 2002):

- Meals
- Transportation
- Therapeutic activities
- Intergenerational programming
- Social services

- Health-related services (such as weight monitoring, blood pressure checks, medication administration)
- Personal assistance (meals, toileting, incontinence, and mobility)
- Personal care services (bath/showers, hair care, and nail care)
- Caregiver support groups
- Medical escort and medical services
- Nursing services
- Medication management
- Rehabilitation therapy

Benefits of Adult Day Services

Adult day services promote the participant's level of independence and can maintain (or even improve) quality of life (Oklahoma Department Human Services, 2005). The participant is able to remain in the community longer and avoid or delay institutionalization. Furthermore, adult day services provide recreational activities which are a greater predictor of life satisfaction than health or income (TDA 2003).

Social isolation is "strongly associated with poor physical and mental health. Isolation often creates feelings of loneliness and depression that further decreases physical activity and social contact, forming a vicious cycle" (TDA 2003). Participants of adult day services are likely to avoid social isolation and experience a positive impact on their health, according to a study done at Harvard University. Elderly people with opportunities to be social were shown to live an average of two years longer than those who were more reclusive or lacked the opportunity to socialize.

Caregivers also benefit from adult day services. Most centers are open during working hours, and a caregiver may be reassured that his/her loved one is safe. Caregivers may also have the opportunity to receive support, receive assistance in planning the care of their loved ones, and take occasional time off.

Alzheimer's/Dementia Specialization

Overall, 20% of all centers reported that they served only people with Alzheimer's disease or related disorders; consequently, 80% of centers indicated that they were not dementia-specific (PIC 2002). Dementia specialization is an important factor when choosing a service. Some facilities may not have the resources care for a participant with dementia, or the participant may need more focused care than other participants.

Need for Additional Facilities

In 2002, Partners in Caregiving stated that 26% of all adult day centers opened in the previous 5 years. However, 56% of the 3,141 counties in the United States were underserved. They estimated that 5,415 *new* adult day centers (1,424 in rural areas and 3,991 in urban areas) were needed nationwide. As of 2002, 36 day care facilities existed in Bexar County. Bexar County was in needed of 10 new facilities; Comal County needed 3 new facilities; Bandera and Kendall counties each needed 1 facility (PIC 2002).

Top Problems /Challenges

Partners in Caregiving (2002) reported the top three problems or challenges for adult day facilities. 62% of the centers had trouble receiving adequate funding. 45% had trouble retaining qualified staff; The Texas Department on Aging (2002) reports that a majority of long-term care is provided by nursing aides that usually receive "low hourly wages and few benefits." Also, the current lack of Registered Nurses may account for part of the staffing issues (staff being unstable and/or unavailable). 33% of centers had trouble maintaining census, and 31% of all centers had problems with transportation and/or marketing/public awareness. Other problems, according to Partners in Caregiving (2002), included adequate space, participant acuity, therapeutic activities, licensing/meeting regulations, and board development.

Choosing an Adult Day Service

When choosing adult day care, a caregiver will need to determine his/her needs and the needs of the person they care for. The following is a list of important factors to consider when looking through a facilities' brochure:

- License or certification
- Years of operation
- Hours of operation
- Days open
- Transportation
- Cost (daily/hourly charges, additional costs, and financial assistance)
- Conditions accepted (memory loss, limited mobility, incontinence etc)
- Staff credentials
- Staff/participant ratio
- Activities provided
- Menu (healthy, balanced, special diets, meals and snacks)

After visiting a facility, the caregiver should note his/her impression of the visit. The caregiver may want to ask himself/herself:

- Did I feel welcomed?
- Did someone spend time figuring out my wants and needs?
- Did someone clearly explain the services and activities?
- Was the facility clean?
- Was the building accessible by wheelchair?
- Was the furniture sturdy and comfortable?
- Was there an isolated area provided for sick participants?
- Did I see cheerful faces on both staff and participants?
- Where participants involved in planning activities, or where participants' suggestions considered?

Summary

The adult day service industry is growing rapidly, but it does not meet demands. A wide range of services are provided, and a caregiver should choose carefully so that he/she and the

loved one receive what they need. Proper funding, retaining qualified staff, and maintaining censuses are the biggest hurdles for existing services. Nevertheless, these programs provide an important form of support for elderly/disabled persons and their caregivers. This form of support is unique to the long-term care system, and necessary for the welfare of many.

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