

Ask Hedy! *On a regular basis, Hedy Ciocci, B.S.N., Administrator of the Selfhelp Home will answer some of the many questions we have around aging. Hedy specializes in dementia care, has extensive experience working with families and elderly patients, and is a registered nurse. She is a frequent lecturer on issues of aging.*

Recently, Hedy interviewed Victoria Baum, M.A., L.C.P.C., N.C.C. Ms. Baum is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor and a Nationally Board Certified Counselor, additionally, a Clinical Care Coordinator.

Ms. Baum is in private practice, (her office is located in Evanston), and serves residents of Chicago and the surrounding North Shore suburbs.



Hedy Ciocci

Baby Boomers Return to More Traditional Care giving Roles

Baby Boomers are more privileged and educated than any previous generation. This generation also did much better economically for themselves than the generation that is following. They are in a good position to assist their parents financially as they age and often serve as family caregivers.

Q. How are today's elderly benefiting from the baby boom generation they produced?

A. The number of family caregivers in the United States today is nearing 60 million. This means approximately 1 in 5 families are providing care, (in their homes or elsewhere), for an elder family member. This represents, to me, a return to an older value system, one that our grandparents held.

It is due, in part, to the "Boomers", as they themselves have provided the increase in medical technology, medications and awareness. Our elders are living longer, in relatively better health and enjoying a greater quality of life. In fact, the average life span for males and females has almost evened out and this average is now up to 77 years of age. It is not uncommon for Baby Boomers to still have one or both of their parents alive, well into their late 80's and 90's.

The Baby Boomer generation is fortunate in this regard, as generations before them lost their parents when they were in their 60's and 70's. This all creates a very different dynamic; as the Boomers' parents are living much more independently and have greater choices for how and where they want to live

Q. Some elderly may have moved away to warmer climates and are no longer in the same cities as their children. Do you see them moving back to Chicago?

A. I see people returning when the parent can no longer live independently or does not want to. Generally, the children would prefer to have their parents reside in, for example, an assisted living situation closer to them. Often, children want their parents closer rather than the parents wanting to return. Baby Boomers are part of a generation that looks for solutions to problems that avoid stress. Elders living away from their children may resist moving, wishing instead that their children and grandchildren would come to visit them more often.

Q. What will happen as these elderly individuals age, require hospitalization or have a catastrophic incident?

A. This is the time, and I believe well before this time, that the adult children meet with their parents and their physicians so that all are well informed and able to determine the best options for the optimal continuum of care required. Often, the elders begin in an independent living situation and when needed, move to assisted living and then to a skilled nursing facility. The process also works backwards,

for instance, an elder could suffer an accident, require skilled nursing and then recover to the point where they can move back to assisted or even, independent living. Actually, these many levels of service, or continuum of care, are more readily found all in the same senior living community, such as The Selfhelp Home.

Q. What happens when the parent is living in their residence for the past 40 years and now they need to move to a place where they can get some assistance? How do you prepare them and help them find the right place?

A. As a Clinical Counselor and Care Coordinator, my job is to do a full assessment of the elder. I will assess their home environment and way of living in an effort to determine what their personal wants and needs are, i.e. safety concerns, etc. and evaluate the family as a system. I believe an elder should be respected and that their care plan should be as close as possible to what they desire. For example, if that means that help comes into the house for a while longer and some safety measures are implemented, then I arrange that.

However, if after the assessment, it is clear that it is time to move, I will then help them find the appropriate place for them to live; the place where they will feel the most comfortable and where their children and grandchildren will want to come visit. (Again, a place where there are levels of care, from independent to skilled nursing, all in the same general location is the most desirable). The most important concern is to get both input from the elder(s) and their children and then put an appropriate care plan together.

But, the basic issue really is what does the elder want. The words I hear most often are "I don't want to be a burden to my children". I respond by saying that the best way to achieve that is to get the entire family together and talk openly about every one's needs and wants. It's best to listen and hear what it is that the elder is communicating as to what they envision for themselves. Then it's no longer a burden; it's family helping family.

The good news is that there are many good options available, for both the parents and their children.