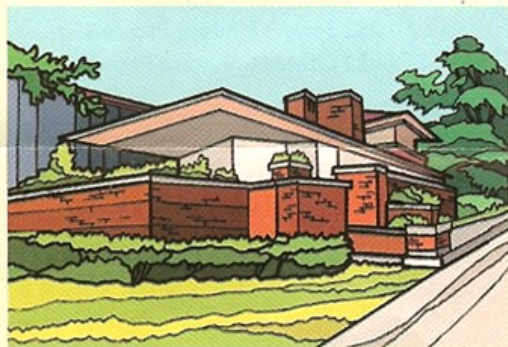


Assisted Living Outside The Box

The assisted living industry is beginning to dangerously parallel the nursing home industry. Already, the term “assisted living” connotes images of a box. It’s a nicer, more beautiful box than a nursing home, with more resi-



dent independence and individual rooms and bathrooms—but it’s a box nonetheless.

The similarities between assisted living facilities and nursing homes are striking. It could be argued that in today’s long term care industry nursing homes and assisted living facilities are now in one category, while independent living, independent living with services, and home care populate a separate category. As we contemplate the

future of assisted living, do we really want to move toward the nursing home model?

One of the biggest errors that government made with nursing homes was that it forced providers to focus too much of their time and energy on the nursing aspect and not enough on the home part. It created onerous paperwork for providers; had two to four people in a room; served institutional meals; and set schedules convenient for the facility, not the person. Respect and dignity were too often forgotten.

Assisted living communities should not be emulating the nursing home model. If we focus on the assistance so much that we overlook the living, we’ll find ourselves in trouble. If we concentrate on the living aspect, however, then a fundamental question becomes: Does it matter where the assistance is provided? As the baby boom generation ages, I believe older seniors will be living in hundreds of different settings in addition to our senior living communities. There will be millions of people living

with their friends and families in small group situations and still needing care. For boomers, assistance will be a necessary irritation for carrying on their lives—not the focus of their lives.

How will this focus on living affect the paradigm of assisted living? For one thing, it will tear down the walls. People will no longer be “residents”—just individuals in need of some assistance. And they won’t be living in “facilities,” they’ll be living in homes, apartments, residences, and in our senior communities.

The venue itself will become far less important, and that’s how we get out of the box. Assisted living becomes a philosophy—not merely a facility.

Let’s not turn assisted living into the 21st century nursing home. Let’s not make more beautiful boxes. Let’s eliminate the box altogether.

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