The Role of Readiness in Residential Moves by Older Parents

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Symposium: Aging—It’s Personal: Caregiving

Gerontological Society of America, November 2016
Background

- Little research has examined older parents’ readiness to accept help to compensate for declining independence
- Why do many older parents resist accepting help from children?
  - To maintain autonomy and sense of mastery of their lives
  - Concern that accepting help will interfere with children’s career
  - To avoid straining family relationships
Background

- Some researchers describe balance of independence and dependence between older parents and adult children as struggle (e.g., Brody, 2010)

- Others frame readiness as key ingredient in balancing autonomy and dependency – to help older adults to live as independently as possible, to maintain a meaningful life in old age (Loe, 2011)

Study Objectives

- Look at role of readiness in residential moves of older parents
- Draw on my experiences as gerontologist helping my father make a long-distance move to independent living in care community
- Describe experiences we shared as I helped my father relocate physically and as he relocated himself on continuum of readiness
- Discuss how our experiences may help others manage transitions to care communities for aging parents while improving quality of life
- Describe implications for future research
My Father’s Story – Life in NYC was Good

• My father was a life-long New Yorker until he moved to Charlotte, NC in May of 2015

• NYC: “The center of the universe”

• Lived in same apartment upper east side for 40 years

• At 91 continued to live completely independently

• Even as frail, very old person, keen interest in the world, warm sense of humor, charming conversationalist

• Very optimistic; reframed difficult situations positively
Surgery that Triggered the Move

- Pacemaker needed urgent replacement late January 2015
- Hospitalization, anesthesia, post-op restrictions ended independence
- Pre-op and post-op, no discussions about help after surgery
- Would not consider leaving his home to recover at my home
- Identified a trustworthy certified home care agency; arranged for home care 8 hours day, 7 days a week, 3 months
- Met with geriatric care manager after hospitalization
  - Advised options in NYC limited, very costly
- With lots of informal help, identified care community with good fit
- Six weeks after surgery, mentioned I found nice care community
- His response: “It can’t happen soon enough.”

To find a geriatric care manager, Aging Life Care Association: https://www.aginglifecare.org/
The Move

• Arranged formal assessment to determine level of care
• Rented independent living apartment (need power of attorney)
• Involved my father in selecting items to move
• Allowed time for “good-byes”
• Identical apartment lay-out
• Ensured he had his most precious belongings
Life in the Care Community

• Thrilled to be reunited with his “stuff,” felt at home
• We shared all meals for several weeks
• Arranged for PT and OT as soon as he moved in
• Strength, balance, walking, gait improved
• Made rounds with his new doctors
• Settled in well in 6 weeks
• Popular, made new friends, many lunch and dinner invitations
Improving Moves and Quality of Life

• Be at least a few steps ahead
  – Readiness can change quickly; plan in advance, be aware of residential preferences, care community options
  – “Right-size” possessions in advance

• Allow lots of time, ensure family communication

• Divide tasks and reach consensus on major decisions

• Provide lots of emotional support, e.g., “I’m moving” postcards; good-bye letters to physicians
Improving Moves and Quality of Life

• Identify and assess care communities

• Informal networks are under-recognized resources; often best source of information about quality of care communities

• Select care community with continuum of care

• Look for in-house personal care services
Improving Moves and Quality of Life

• Nothing beats face time and in-person advocacy

• Get to know:
  – seating hostess or host
  – physical and occupational therapy
  – housekeeping and maintenance
  – personal care services
  – front desk staff
  – wellness nurse

• Most use email, helps manage time
Implications for Research

- Most families navigate care communities on their own; need better information about quality, costs, resources, options

- Opportunity to better understand role of family caregivers after parent enters care community, e.g., types, amount of care, need for respite, other services
Implications for Research – Role of Readiness

• Readiness may contribute importantly to older adults’ decisions about residential moves
  – Readiness works at turning point of independence and dependency, can help maintain autonomy, sense life is meaningful despite increasing dependency
  – Explore role of readiness with qualitative research
  – Examine how readiness is influenced by personality traits, social, economic, and demographic characteristics
Implications for Research – Role of Readiness

• What characteristics or traits increase acceptance of help and participation in decision-making as dependency increases?

• Develop questions about readiness for longitudinal surveys

• Results from longitudinal surveys would allow us to examine role of readiness as dependency increases
Implications for Research – Role of Readiness

- Explore role of readiness as older adults move to more intensive care, e.g., independent living to assisted living.

- Design interventions to promote readiness among those likely to benefit; consider adapting transtheoretical model of behavior change (Prochaska, 2008).

- Extend concept of readiness to understand needs of adult children as health of older parent declines.