**3 Steps To Reducing Caregiver Stress By Shopping Smart**

If you are caring for an older loved one with an illness or disability—you will likely need help from the senior care system (nursing homes, assisted living communities, adult day care centers, hospice, home health, home care, etc.) at some point. Ultimately utilizing these services will reduce your stress as a caregiver. But finding the right professional services can initially be overwhelming. Here are 3 ways to ensure finding services best matched for you and your older loved one the first time around:

1. **Identify Your Non-Negotiables**

When you are choosing assisted living, nursing home, home care or other services, make a list of everything you want that service to be or to provide. Make this list as long as you like. Then, narrow it down to three non-negotiables. You may be familiar with this concept in other areas of your life. You probably created a must-have list with a real estate agent when purchasing a home. On a smaller scale, perhaps you’ve made such a list when planning a vacation.

As with buying a home or planning a vacation, non-negotiables for senior care services are different for everyone. For example, if your older loved one has multiple serious chronic health problems and you are considering assisted living, 24 hour nursing coverage onsite may be important. Some other non-negotiables that families have frequently insisted on include items like these:

• A certain geographic location

• A fitness, pool or specific type of exercise classes

• Transportation to shopping, doctor’s appointments, or cultural centers

• Affiliation with a certain religion

• Staff who speak a specific foreign language

Another common non-negotiable comes up for men who are seeking assisted living or nursing homes—they want there to be other male residents! Because women live longer, there are generally significantly more females in nursing homes and assisted living communities. But a non-negotiable for some men is that they want to be able to hang out with and make new men friends when they are considering a new residence. Of course, there are other men who don’t care about this at all. The point is, what’s a non-negotiable item for one older person or caregiving crew may not be relevant at all for another.

1. **Don’t Read Too Much into Tax status**

Frequently caregivers make assumptions about an organization based on its for-profit, nonprofit, or government status. Both good and bad care . . . occurs at all types of organizations, regardless of their tax status.

Negative and positive stereotypes are associated with all three of these types of organizations. On one hand, some people believe that for-profit organizations are only concerned about the almighty dollar. On the other hand, some caregivers assume that a for-profit nursing home will do a better job because they assume that staff are paid better.

Some caregivers have the preconceived notion that a nonprofit or a government organization won’t be of high enough quality. Alternatively, other caregivers might assume that a nonprofit with a religious affiliation will offer better care because the people who work there follow specific religious teachings. Some might believe that a government nursing home or hospital will offer better care because they are more highly regulated by the government. Both good and bad care as well as mediocre care occurs at all types of organizations, regardless of their tax status. Try to judge each individual organization on its own merits. Don’t rule out (or rule in) an organization simply because of its tax affiliation.

1. **Don’t Maintain Fixed Assumptions about Brands**

If you have ever been to a franchise or chain store, restaurant, or hotel, you know that every location does not always offer precisely the same quality service, food, or surroundings as another. For example, maybe you are a loyalty member at Marriott or Hilton. You likely have your favorite properties in their portfolio; not every Marriott or Hilton is the same. Keep this in mind when you hear that the “Smith” chain of nursing homes is fantastic but the “Jones” chain is terrible. You really must evaluate each service or organization on its own merits. There are many large franchises and chains of nursing homes, assisted living communities, home care organizations, etc. Keep in mind that a good experience at one does not guarantee a good experience at another (and vice versa).

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