**Tips for moving a loved one to an assisted-living facility**

Posted by Rebecca A. Davis/The Ohio State University November 12, 2008 03:24AM

Q. My family is moving my mother into an assisted living unit for dementia patients within the month. She’s been diagnosed with frontotemporal dementia and has an attention span of approx one to two minutes (sometimes less).

I’m not sure how to handle the transition of moving her into the nursing facility. If we tell her exactly what is happening, I know she’ll be very upset. However, I don’t want her to wake up in a strange place, not knowing what’s going on. Realizing that everyone is different, are there some approaches that are better than others?

A. Moving your loved one is never easy, but there are some things you can do to make the transition smoother.

First off, it is recommended that families do preliminary moving and arranging of the person’s furniture and possessions in the new assisted-living apartment. Make it look homey and have several items of importance and familiarity in the apartment on the move-in day, such as:

- Pillows.
- Afghan blankets.
- Quilts on the bed and/or couch.
- Family photos on the wall or in a scrapbook.
- A favorite chair.

It can certainly be hard to tell a loved one that they will be moving into an assisted-living facility. It might disturb your loved one if you tell them in advance of the move, and often times they will forget this information quickly.

One way to approach the situation, is that on the day of move-in, you make it a “special visit” to the assisted-living facility and refer to it as the new “senior apartment with wonderful services.” You do not need to call it an assisted-living facility with your loved one. Persons with dementia often have decreased insight into their own weaknesses, and they may feel they don’t need assistance, even though they do.

One suggestion is to schedule the move-in process to coincide with having lunch in the assisted-dining room. This could help your loved one see that this new apartment will have opportunities to eat good food and socialize with others. Tips on how to engage in socialization could be:

- Join a table of other residents.
- Introduce your loved one.
- Help guide the conversation.
- Interject about how lovely everything looks and how friendly everyone is.

Then after lunch, have the admission staff take you and your loved one to the new apartment and help familiarize them with this new environment. Important things to talk about could include:

- Afghan blankets.
- Quilts on the bed and/or couch.
- A favorite chair.
- Family photos on the wall or in a scrapbook.
- Personalized photo gifts for the holidays.
• Bathroom location

• How to work the call light

• Which light switches turn on which lights

• Where the phone is and how to use it

Then, after you have spent some time trying to acclimate your loved one to their new home, you will need to prepare to leave.

Often the admission staff can help with this transition by coming to get the person and having them participate in an activity or continue on a larger tour of the complex while you leave. Let your loved one know that you will call later in the day to check on them and will return soon to visit. Your loved one may be very angry about being left at the assisted-living facility, but that is when the staff needs to take over and work on engaging the person in the routines of the facility.

Sometimes families will tell the person that the move is only temporary. For example, they may say things like the old house is getting repaired or use some other reason for the move. This approach can be useful if the person is extremely agitated, but it can also confuse the person. They may continue to think that they will be leaving soon and may resist getting involved with others at the facility because of this.

Sometimes the facility may suggest not visiting again for a couple of days after the move-in, but a visit the following day can be helpful. It can include bringing more items from the old home to the new assisted-living apartment and possibly accompanying your loved one to an activity. Maybe make the next day visit brief, as you want the person to be encouraged to settle into their new home and for the staff to work on building a relationship with your loved one.

Most persons will adjust to their new homes and often enjoy all the activities and socialization. Remember, your loved one’s dementia requires that their families provide for their continued safety and care, as the person no longer can make these judgment calls and decisions.