

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Alzheimer's Disease and Long Term Planning

This might be the most difficult area to talk about. In this section we will talk about why it is so important to:

- Make plans about money and finances
- Make plans about future health care decisions.

Planning for the future is necessary because we know that as time goes on, the disease gets worse. That means your loved one will need more help with care, and will be less and less able to make decisions for him or herself.

As we know, caregiving can last many years—most often 9 years. For some people with Alzheimer's care is needed as little as 2 years or as long as 22 years depending on the person's health. I suggest families' work to put together a comprehensive care plan. You will also want to consider how to keep yourself healthy since you are meeting the needs of another person much of the time. Just as each person with Alzheimer's is different, there is no one plan I can recommend.

Financial Planning

It is best to consult with an expert such as an accountant, lawyer or social worker for help with financial or money planning. So you will have a good place to start, I will go over areas that can help you as you begin this type of planning. Let's start with short-term money issues.

Short-Term Financial Planning

From the early stage on, your loved one will need help with ordinary matters such as:

- Shopping and paying for things the way they used to,
- Banking needs
- Managing his or her property, if they are homeowners
- Paying bills.
- Doing paperwork and managing wills, life insurance, and other financial documents.
- Manage Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, SSI and other benefits.

Long Term Financial Planning

It is important to look at financial issues that may come up in the future. Long-term financial planning can be complicated.

It includes:

- Issues about inheritances—or who will get any money or property when your loved one dies

- Making a will about medical and financial needs
- Making arrangements about selling or caring for property
- Setting aside money for funeral arrangements

Long-term financial planning may mean you need a lawyer's advice, or even naming a representative for your loved one's finances. It is best to talk over your loved one's wishes about a will or property in the early stage of Alzheimer's while he or she still can make decisions. Because if you and your family members don't, you may have to make decisions without really knowing what your loved one wanted.

There are several legal guides that can be used in long range financial planning. These guides are:

- 1) *A Durable Power of Attorney*
- 2) *A Trust* (in those cases where it is appropriate to set one up)
- 3) *A Will*

A Durable Power of Attorney is a document your loved one signs naming a person to serve as his or her representative (agent).

The person who has power of attorney will:

- Administer all, or part of the person with Alzheimer's estate, money and/or personal matters. The document can include instructions and orders to handle your family member's interests. Your loved one can change the person who holds power of attorney whenever he or she might want to.

A Trust is a legal arrangement where a person or an institution called the *trustee* has the right to distribute goods and properties to other persons called *beneficiaries*. A trust can be used to maintain the person's with Alzheimer's property during their lifetime. If there is a great deal of property owned by the person, this document is especially important. A trust can be written in a way that its instructions stay in effect after the person's death.

A Will is another important document for long range financial planning. A will is different from the other documents I have just described because it only takes effect after the person's death.

Long Term Health Planning

Long-range health Planning includes more issues than I can discuss here.

I will just give you some ideas of why health planning is important.

- 1) It may become necessary to change where the person with Alzheimer's lives at some point. It may become unsafe for him or her to live alone.
- 2) The disease may become so advanced that your loved one can no longer be cared for at home by family, and may need to live in a nursing home.

I know that these can be enormously difficult decisions for you and your family. However, because the main concern is your family member's well being, you may have to act. That's why it's good to think ahead and make plans. Whether you take care of the person with Alzheimer's for 2 years or 9 years or more, there will be times when his or her health will require special the attention as I have just discussed. Because of this, it is never too soon to begin future health planning.

There are various tools that can assist with longer range health planning. These guides are:

- 1) *A Durable Power of Attorney for Health*
- 2) *A Living Will*

A Durable Power of Attorney for Health is similar to the durable power of attorney for the administration of money and property, but in this case it is written just for health matters.

Through this document, the person with Alzheimer's names someone as the representative (agent) who can make health decisions should he or she become unable to do so. It also can include specific instructions to cover these decisions. This document also helps the doctor and family respect the person with Alzheimer's wishes about their future health care. It can also ease tensions among family members that can come up when others try to guess your loved one's medical wishes.

A Living Will is a written instruction that allows a patient to spell out their wishes regarding their future medical treatments, especially when artificial means (machines) are the only way to keep him alive. This document only takes effect if your family member is unable to make decisions for him or herself.

The Living Will is different from the Durable Power of Attorney for Health because the Living Will does not require the naming of a representative (agent). In many states the living will is used when the person is in a coma or what's called a *vegetative state*. In other words, the person can no longer see or hear or speak, and does not respond to the outside world at all.