

## **“AGING IN PLACE”- IS IT RIGHT FOR YOU?**

*by Patricia A. Maisano RN, CCM, WCCM, ABDA; President & CEO, IKOR® Incorporated*

“Aging in Place” is not just a new buzzword, it is an essential element in the options available to the growing elderly and disabled populations. As the baby boomer generation begins to contemplate their future, remaining in the home and as independent as possible is the most desirous choice. The specialists at IKOR are often asked if “Aging in Place” is possible in lieu of a facility placement, and in many cases the answers is yes. But “Aging in Place” is not for everyone.

For individuals with memory loss who have demonstrated a desire for “wandering”, remaining at home often exposes the individual to needless dangers. The real possibility of the confused person becoming lost causes the family profound concern and unnecessary stress.

For the person with a progressive visual deficit, a home with stairs can become a genuine safety concern. When stairs are required to reach such basic needs as a bathroom or kitchen, the environment must be modifiable to insure the individual's safe mobility, provided modification is financially feasible in the long-term. In some cases of progressive visual loss, or in some forms of Alzheimer's, color differences can no longer be determined. A standard cream or white bathroom or kitchen, seen in some many homes today, can become a frightening and dangerous environment.

For the person who has become wheelchair dependent, access becomes a very important issue. Although the general population is aware of the ramps used in public buildings, ramps are just one part of a multiphase plan for home modification. Although ramps can be built, in many private residences (particularly old residences) hallways and doorways are often not large enough to permit a fluid movement of the wheelchair.

Access and mobility go hand-in-hand. Adequate space for a wheelchair from the entrance to a bedroom is not just a convenience for sleeping or privacy; it is a necessity particularly in cases of emergency circumstances such as in the case of fire. Bathrooms within the home are another important access issue. For someone whose disability has, or will, cause them to be wheelchair dependent, a bathroom, which can comfortably fit not just a wheelchair but also two persons is required. If the disabled person is an obese adult, the bathroom may require space, adequate for three individuals, enabling the assistance of two other individuals to the disabled person. In many cases, the standard bathtub is no longer a viable option for either bathing or showering. A shower space must permit the disabled person with assistance, to walk-in and safely sit down.

While many people have considered some of the aspect of home modifications, it is just as important to consider the aspect of socialization as a significant “quality of life” issue. If a person remaining at home is limited in his or her ability to socialize with their peers (either through age or ability), there can be a negative effect on the overall well-being. Often isolation leads to depression, and can have an overall deleterious effect to an individual's physical well-being. When considering the socialization issue in determining the viability of Homecare for “Aging in Place” it is important to be realistic as to the needs of the individual. When considering the aspect of socialization, one must consider the nature of the person. If the person was by nature an introverted or reclusive prior to aging or disability, the nature of the person does not change. Many families feel that all elderly/ disabled persons need a constant flow of socialization in the form of friends and activities. If an individual was not a social being in their youth, it is highly unlikely that they will feel comfortable or fulfilled with socialization in their senior years. To enhance the quality of life, the life pattern should be preserved whenever possible.

Some modifications, such as changing the color of walls, can be done inexpensively while others, such as widening doorways, reconstructing bathrooms, installing ramps, reconstructing kitchens, or modifying counter height can be very costly. In some instances the available space makes the option of environmental modifications impossible. In other circumstances, modification of a home could ultimately result in a devaluation of the residents as it pertains to future sale. And finally, the overall cost for home modification, although feasible, may be completely cost prohibitive. An expert in the field of aging, with a dynamic grasp of the

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resources available and an understanding of the needs of the Aging/Disabled individual, can provide a comparative analysis between Homecare costs (including modification costs and environmental/financial impact) and facility placement.

As our society continues to age, the demand to remain independent, and to remain in one's home grows daily. Making sound decisions regarding the resources for physical care, the needs of the individual, and the impact of environmental change, can provide the greatest opportunity for success in the "Aging in Place" plan.

*IKOR® Incorporated is a regional care management and professional guardianship firm providing solutions to every aspect of the needs of the elderly and disabled. Their phone number is (302) 489-3100.*

**John B. Linvill, Jr., CSA ~ (610) 688-1587**  
**[www.jlinvillLTC.com](http://www.jlinvillLTC.com) ~ [www.jlinvill.com](http://www.jlinvill.com)**

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Inflation calculations are based upon current economic statistics and estimates for the Philadelphia area.*

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