

LIFTING THE BLACK CLOUD OVER ELDER CARE

By:
Judith S. Parnes
LCSW, CMC
Executive
Director



As a baby boomer, if you have recently visited a loved one in any type of living facility, regardless of the cleanliness, safety, activity schedule, administrator, and members of the board, you were most likely thankful that you did not have to live there and could not wait to leave. As nice as it might have tried to be, facilities are not like “home.” And, you probably walked out the door promising yourself that “you will never end up in a place like this.”

But for baby boomers to see improvements in their own elder life options, their generation will have to take responsibility and reform the industry if a transformation of

the state of senior care is to occur. Too little stimulation, overworked caretakers, barren environments, bland food, and understaffed facilities are a nationwide epidemic. Currently, there are 78 million baby boomers in the US, and by 2030, 58 million (then ages 66-84) will still be alive. Where do you think many of us will be living? According to AARP statistics, only about one quarter of us will be on our own and unassisted in old age.

The same generation that sought to revolutionize just about everything is now responsible for revolutionizing elder care if they want a different future than that of their parents.

The for-profit nursing home industry, valued at \$30 billion dollars, is dominated by chains which are owned by private investment groups. Statistics show that these facilities are 41 percent more profitable than the average facility. A lot of money is to be made, and it seems as though profits are a product of cutting operating

costs. The result seems to be fewer caregivers with less training, a higher turnover rate, and stressed-out workers that are caring for our parents. Additionally, food, supplies, and activity budgets are being cut.

We must start *now* to make things better. Advocating for change, whether facility-by-facility in our own state or by contacting New Jersey’s Office of the Ombudsman for the Institutionalized Elderly in the Department of the Public Advocate, is a good start. A few solutions can be found in increasing the number of staff, improving food, softening the institutionalized atmosphere, rethinking activities, and creating opportunities for meaningful involvement on the part of the residents.

We must become part of the solution before we become part of the problem.

Judith S. Parnes, L.C.S.W., C.M.C., Gerontologist and Elder Care Consultant is Executive Director of Elder Life Management, Inc., Ocean, NJ. ELM provides quality elder care planning, management and Medicaid application services to older adults and their families. Please visit www.elderlifemanagement.org or call (732) 493-8080 for more information