

One-stop shopping nears for senior services, care

Fasten your seatbelt. Big changes are coming to senior care and services, changes that will reverberate through the industry, our nation's economy and our personal lives.

There's no need to panic, unless you:

- Are a senior or expect to become one
- Have aging parents
- Pay taxes
- Work for a company that serves seniors

OK, panic a little. The dark clouds of the coming storm are on the horizon. And it's a perfect storm if there ever was one, a confluence of demographics, sky-rocketing medical costs, an essentially unsolvable shortage of care workers, and fundamental changes in the cultural and psychological profile of senior consumers.

And as the hurricane forecasters remind us, it's not the strength of a storm that matters; it's how long it lasts.

For most of us, these winds will be whistling around us for the rest of our lives.

There is some good news, but first we should understand how we got painted into this corner in the first place. A list of all the contributing factors would be long, but clearly the major culprit is simple demographics — the millions of Baby Boomers just now beginning to reach retirement age.

It's an already-grim statistic made worse by the inconvenient fact that we are living longer.

While policymakers, medical professionals and service providers struggle with the impact from this demographic trend, a handful of forward-thinking companies, non-profits and even (gasp) government agencies are experimenting with innovative business models that hold great promise.

Some of the most interesting are initiatives that aggregate a wide range of information and services in one place. This "under-one-roof" concept promises to reduce confusion while shifting the emphasis from competition to cooperation among providers and streamlining the delivery of services. A couple of interesting examples of this trend can be found right here in Brevard.

Main Street PMC, Titusville.
Still on the drawing board,



Don Kramer

Focus on Seniors

On the air

- "Elder Hour" can be heard at 9 a.m. Thursdays on WMEL-AM (920)
- "Aging With Dignity" airs at 6:30 p.m. Mondays on Bright House Channel 15, 8:30 a.m. Wednesdays and 5 p.m. Fridays on Channel 1

this ambitious hospital-owned project is modeled after a town square. Many of the buildings will be historic homes moved to the site and restored. A wide range of programs and services are planned, including recreation, education and health and senior care. Main Street PMC promises a whole-person approach, with a staff geriatrician heading up a comprehensive care team. The project will be partially funded by philanthropy, and Phase I is scheduled to open in 2008.

One Senior Place, Viera.

Think of a cross between a library, a senior community center and a mall where all of the shops and businesses are independent providers of care, services and products for seniors. Services provided by the center — use of the unique Senior Resource Library, consultation with the on-site Elder Care Manager, attendance at the many events and seminars — are free, and the wide range of senior-focused resident businesses offer one-stop-shopping convenience.

While the dark clouds still loom, these and other early models of consolidated senior services hold out the promise of a silver lining. Today, most folks don't have such a resource nearby, but — and you can quote me on this — a few years down the road, this approach will revolutionize the way Americans shop for elder care and services. ■

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