

What the Community Must Do for Elderly

By MARIE J. WEIDMAN

When the doctor shakes his head and says Aunt Mildred cannot live alone any longer, what's to be done? She is not exactly sick, nor well either, she is a member of that ever increasing group known as the "ill well" — they need some daily attention but not of the highly skilled, professional variety.

Aunt Mildred thinks traditionally of going immediately into a church-sponsored home for the aged; it's what she always had in mind for herself "when the time came." She has saved for the day when she can be "near the chapel."

Unfortunately, scores of other Aunt Mildreds and Uncle Hermans have had the same thought — there is just no room for her nor is there likely to be for some time.

The bonus of longer lives given to us through the skills of medicine and research has turned into a mixed blessing. The numbers of people in quite advanced old age are increasing far more rapidly than are the facilities to accommodate them. The net result is total frustration of the aged person himself and despair for the nearest relatives who naturally cannot accommodate him.

We must invent new ways of helping the elderly to live out their lives in comfort and dignity.

In casting about for these new ways, we have become too eager to turn to government. No matter what government does to help the aged it can never be total enough, the problem is a chronic, long term one. We just cannot legislate old age or poverty out of our milieu, no matter how high the taxes rise. Certainly programs of Medicare and Medicaid have offered more care to more elderly than ever before in our history, but unless individuals and groups take initiative where government stops, Aunt Mildred is never going to live in peace.

One partial solution of where to put the person who is still well but in need of supervision, is the evolution of the supervised boarding home. This is really a small-group home run by individuals for profit, yet it has served well those elderly who need routine supervision and regular meals. The independence of a person is still intact — he may pursue the activities he is able to yet he has the security of supervision. But these homes are also crowded.

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This is the last in a two-part series on the ever-growing problem confronting senior citizens like this elderly lady.

The articles point out some of the problems older people must cope with and some of the possible solutions being tried to assure them a happy place in modern life.



concept and needs to be developed further—in our community there appears the possibility that some parish centers may be vacated due to the re-grouping of teaching Sisters. Some of these buildings would be ideal housing for ambulant elderly. Using these existing buildings is especially attractive since they are near churches, and

constant scrutiny by regulatory bodies.

But as everything can be improved, there is room for one large and important change in nursing homes; a change not involved with the complexities of Medicaid or Medicare, a change not related to legislation or bureaucracy. We need Catholic priests specifically assigned to these units, to bring comfort to those bedridden patients who have long since given up hope of ever being at peace again with God and themselves. There are many such patients who need to talk, to relate to someone

it is well recognized the deepened meaning which religion assumes for aging persons.

Such facilities are geared only to the ambulant person. If he becomes ill and is placed in a commercial nursing home, other questions arise. It is considered rather "in" these days to criticize nursing home care for their lack of staffs or the quality of the care. What this community with its large numbers of ill aged would do without them, has never been determined.

Also, for some time past nursing homes have been increasingly upgraded and improved and they are under

who they know is concerned for them. This is our Spiritual Inner City, but it is a silent one, unable to demonstrate or make known its desolation and despair.

Although many elderly persons see admission to a church home as a desirable plan for themselves, many make an effort to remain in their own homes. For this there are daily homemaking services available in this community.

A highly successful effort to keep the elderly person in his own home is Meals on Wheels. This plan provides two nourishing meals per day for those who cannot prepare their own food.

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