

TRANSITIONS

Interview for broadcast on 19th January 2020

Richard: We're living in an aging society. There are more people over 65 than ever before with an ever growing demand for aged care support. How do families negotiate the transition into aged care? I'm Richard Fox, and this is Messages Of Hope.

Richard: When you're parents are aging and transitioning into an aged care home, how do you deal with all the emotions involved? There's grief, guilt, frustration, leaving you emotionally and even physically drained. Today I'm talking with Annette. She's worked in aged care for over 30 years.

Richard: Annette, what do the children of a parent going into a nursing home need to know?

Annette: What do they need to know? Well they need to know that their parent is being well cared for and the action of putting their loved one into a nursing home is being done out of love. They know their mother or their father need more medical help than a family member can provide now. They need 24 hour care. And so they have done the right thing and they will be well cared for. Initially it's hard for the family member to see that and understand that and trust that but as time goes on I've seen them build the relationships with staff and family and everyone is much more settled and much more happy.

Richard: What about the parent, what kinds of things are they experiencing at the moment of transition?

Annette: Oftentimes when residents come into a nursing home they have come from a hospital environment where it's become apparent that they can't go back into their own homes and look after themselves so they come in quite frail, often very unwell dealing with illnesses. And so they're coming very sad often and very fatalistic that this is probably the end of my life now.

Richard: Are there other things they're grieving about?

Annette: A lot of them feel like "my family's put me here." That's a phrase I hear time and again. A little bit of resentment that the family has put them there and "what's going to happen to me now?" It's all very unfamiliar surroundings. I think as we all get older it's nice to know where our home is, where our bed is, where our comfort is. All of a sudden you're in another place knowing that you can never go back home and that's a real sadness for a lot of people.

Richard: Have do families cope with that sadness?

Annette: I've noticed daughters in particular struggle with grief and guilt. You know that they can't do more for their loved one at home. But it's become very obvious for health reasons that that's not a practical thing anymore. For some reason it seems very hard

for daughters when mum goes into a nursing home. You often see them leave and they are in tears or holding back tears. You just speak to them and ask them if they're OK or if they need anything or can I help you in any way? More often than not they're just struggling to take a deep breath and go home and think again.

Richard: Coping with the transition into aged care can be really difficult. Knowing that someone cares can help ease the hurt. Residents need to know they're still loved and that they're valued by someone else. Annette, does that care always make the transition easier?

Annette: For people transitioning into nursing homes, the things that are put in place and the different staff and talking to them and the invaluable support of their family doesn't always work out well. I've worked with people who are really very unhappy with having being put in a nursing home and that stays with them until death. And that's very difficult.

Richard: Could you share an example of the kind of difficulties some families experience?

Annette: There was a particular lady who was very angry at her son and she had decided that her son had taken all her money and she was just particularly angry with him. As time went on she didn't want to see him. She was refusing to see him and he would come visit and she'd be very definite that he would leave and that was her right. She didn't want him there so he had to leave. As time went on she became very sad because she kept saying "My son doesn't visit me." So I think she really wanted her son to visit but she couldn't overcome her anger enough to allow him in which was a sad one. It was a sad one because I think she died still estranged from him because she did really alienate him and accuse him of lots of things that he didn't do.

Richard: So what can you do if you have a parent like that?

Annette: I think they have to just keep presenting, no matter how difficult it is just keep coming and visiting. Once again you just show love and as much patience and be prayerful. You know God still loves them and he's caring for them. We don't understand why people have these afflictions or illnesses or why we have to get old. But we do. That's the life cycle but God still loves you.

Richard: Do you have any insights in how to cope with a transition into aged care. Please share them with us on our Facebook page at Messages of Hope. You may be able to encourage someone going through the same thing. That's Facebook – Messages of Hope.

Going into aged care is a major life change. Annette, what would you say to someone who doesn't want to go into aged care?

Annette: Well I think I can probably bounce back a little bit better and talk about Aunty Clare. She didn't feel that she needed to go into a nursing home and she didn't want to go into a nursing home.

Richard: So how would you encourage Aunty Clare?

Annette: We just assured her that we would come back, that we would visit her as much as we could. We reassured her that Jesus loved her and she would say “yes I know Jesus loves me” and just keep repeating that at every visit and just reassuring her all the time that we will come back. We haven't left you here. We will always be with you. The staff are here to care for you and look after you. Just spending time and reassuring. I think a lot of elderly people ,particularly in nursing homes feel like no one's got any time for them. Everyone is too busy in their lives so just to have someone sit and spend time with them and listen to them is such an important role from volunteers to family to care staff.

Richard: Can you tell us about the time you were able to offer support to someone who was all alone?

Annette: I had an experience with a dear man who was, I'm calling him a dear man but he was a difficult man, very much estranged from his family and he was dying, he was in his last days and he had given the staff a really difficult time too, he was a very prickly man. And I felt for him lying in his room, just lying there without anything, not a lot of consciousness there anymore, just going to heaven. And I just felt so sad so every time I walked past the room I would go and sit in alongside of him and just hold his hand for a minute and I'd say the 23rd Psalm because I think in this world everybody knows the 23rd psalm, if they're a Christian or not. Although he wasn't responding very much he would squeeze my hand and that was very precious. I thought this difficult man who was so estranged from his children and his wife and yet he knew, I think, in his dying time that God was real.

Richard: For more information about dealing with the emotions of moving into aged care, go to messagesofhope.org.au to order your free booklet – WHO CARES WHEN I HURT? Or give us a call on 1800 353 350 for your free copy of WHO CARES WHEN I HURT?

Annette, to wrap up todays program, what is a highlight for you of working with families in aged care?

Annette: It is a lovely thing to see daughters who come in and they'll bring favorite treats to eat or they'll just spend time and they're there regularly. To me that's more valuable than anything for the well-being of the residents because that reassures them that they are loved.