

## **There ought to be a brokerage for elder care**

Mary Umberger  
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In a recent 24-hour period that practically overflowed with stress, I toured seven assisted-living facilities, looking for a new home for elderly family members who no longer could live on their own.

I got nowhere.

Oh, sure, they were lovely places. These assisted-living homes -- in which seniors live in apartments on a relatively independent basis, supported by in-house health, nutrition and social services -- were impressive. All of them were clean and tastefully decorated, although it did seem they all had the same interior designer -- with a penchant for striped upholstery and hunter-green carpeting.

It's just that all of these places had one drawback or another. The units were too small, or the services seemed inadequate. Or they were stunningly expensive. We put more than 100 miles on the car, just looking.

Somewhere toward the end of our forced march, my brother said, "You know, there ought to be a brokerage for these places, a centralized service -- kind of like a real estate agent."

Turns out, there are such resources, sort of. But as a specialized profession, it's in its infancy. The elder care referral business ranges from Internet listings -- most of them too sketchy, in my view -- to government agencies to entrepreneurs who see a vast market in people like me, people who are time-pressed and worried.

"There is such a huge need, from the family's perspective," says Pamala Temple. Her two-year-old Seattle company, A Place for Mom, is taking an interesting stab at it. It's not a brokerage, but a referral service.

It's a dot-com ([www.aplaceformom.com](http://www.aplaceformom.com)) that puts people who are looking for elder care in touch with one of 25 counselors around the country, including two in Illinois. The counselors help clients sort out their needs -- independent versus assisted living, in-home care versus nursing home, etc. -- and then make referrals to specific businesses. The company's fee is paid by the care providers.

She says that to her knowledge, it's the only company aiming to provide such services on a national basis, though many localities have "geriatric care managers." That's an emerging related field, in which families of senior citizens hire a specialist to tackle a

range of needs, from finding housing to managing day-to-day affairs for the senior when relatives live too far away to handle them. The National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers' Web site is [www.caremanager.org](http://www.caremanager.org); telephone 520-881-8008.

Another group, the Seniors Advantage Real Estate Council in Murphys, Calif., trains real estate agents who want to specialize in buying and selling seniors' properties. Its co-founder, Jill Corliss, says that though some of her group's members might have extensive knowledge of the retirement-facilities field, it wouldn't be the norm.

It seems to me that there ought to be a place in the market for an "elder care multiple listing service" with retirement facilities' floor plans, costs, services, maps -- availability of units! -- all in one place. It might be a service of an apartment-rental agency. Or a drawing card for the savvy real estate agent who eventually wants to reap the commission of selling the senior's home.

Or none of the above. Temple is a speech pathologist by education who has worked in marketing in assisted living. "It gave me some good insight to what people are dealing with," Temple said. "You don't want to go to 48 care providers. You can't. You want somebody to say, 'Here, try these three.'"