

## BETHANY LIFE COMMUNITIES—CARE TRENDS

Long term care, defined as hands-on assistance for people who need help with fundamental daily activities such as bathing or eating, is changing constantly. This is certainly true at Bethany Life Communities. In recent years, BLC has been a pioneer in the field of dementia care and has successfully implemented the Eden Alternative---an approach that emphasizes the positive roles for children, plants and animals in enhancing elder care. Last year, BLC introduced CareTracker, a new computer-based system that revolutionizes the documenting and subsequent use of individual resident care statistics.

What are the challenges and trends that will shape the future of long term care services? For openers, we have the 500-pound gorilla, the baby boomers. Like a tidal wave cascading across the ocean, the baby boomer generation will have a dominating impact on long term care. Between 1946 and 1964, there were 77 million babies born in the U. S. In 2011, the oldest boomers will turn 65. On average, the boomers will live to be 83, but many will continue well into their 90s and beyond. Not surprisingly, a 2003 Report to Congress from the Department of Health and Human Resources identified the baby boomer generation as the most significant factor increasing the demand for long term care services over the next half century. The report says the number of people utilizing paid care from nursing facilities, alternative residential care or home care services will skyrocket from 15 million in 2000 to an estimated 27 million in 2050.

This translates to an increase in demand for direct care workers (RNs, LPNs, vocational nurses, nurse aides, home health and personal care workers). In 2000, about 1.9 million direct care workers provided care for the previously mentioned 15 million people needing paid long term care services. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that direct care workers in long term care settings should grow by 45% to 2.7 million by 2010. The demand for long term direct care workers escalates as boomers reach 85 in 2030. By 2050, it is estimated that 5.7-6.6 million workers will be needed in this field---an increase of well over 200%!

Meeting this demand will be a big-time challenge in view of the fact that the traditional supply pool of long term care workers (women between the ages of 25-54) will increase very little between 2000 and 2050---only 9%!

Boomer demographics will also have major impacts on unpaid or informal caregivers in future years. Interestingly, the majority of long term care is currently provided by family, friends and neighbors in the U. S. In 2000, about 20 million informal/unpaid caregivers were involved in long term care and this number is projected to grow to 37 million by 2050. Since the average family size is trending downward, a decreasing number of sons and daughters will be faced with trying to meet the increasing care needs of their parents and loved ones. According to a 2004 Georgetown University study, in less than ten years, the number of people likely to need long term care will increase much faster than the number of people available either as family (informal) or paid caregivers.

On the surface, the statistics seem almost overwhelming. But, the market place and other forces have a way of working through tough issues like the impending demand for long term care. In our next article, we'll explore some of the likely changes and trends that will be needed to cope with the future long term care challenges.