

Moving dad to JB nursing home was last resort

Singaporean siblings cannot afford local nursing homes for dad, especially after mum is paralysed following stroke. -TNP

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He is in his late 30s, still single and not keen to settle down yet.

Mr K.W. Lee said he is not confident of providing for his own needs, let alone those of a family.

Together with his two older sisters, he bears the burden of supporting their parents, both with medical conditions that require round-the-clock care.

In 2007, the senior Mr Lee came down with a serious bout of aspiration pneumonia, which left him frail and bedridden.

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"The illness, which weakened the muscles of his mouth and oesophagus made my father completely dependent. He could not walk and had to be tube-fed," said Mr Lee, who works in the health-care industry.

"In addition, he also suffers from dementia and Parkinson's disease."

He thought of putting his father in a nursing home but found the fees too high.

He said: "Many nursing homes we visited not only said they had no vacancy and that we had to be put on a waiting list, but they charged around \$1,700 to \$1,800 a month for my father to be admitted there.

"These figures did not even include consumables such as medicine and diapers.

"My sisters and I felt angry because the cost was so high, and yet we were told that we were not eligible for any subsidies."

Together, Mr Lee and his two sisters, who are also single, earn about \$10,000 a month.

That puts the family above the ceiling for nursing home subsidies.

Families who wish to get these subsidies must undergo means testing.

The level of subsidies depends largely on the monthly per capita income.

Families with per capita incomes below or equal to \$360 can get up to 75 per cent in subsidies.

Those with per capita incomes exceeding \$1,400 are typically not eligible.

Despite the high cost, Mr Lee felt he had "no choice" and eventually checked his father, now 87, into a nursing home close to his home.

Each month, he had to pay between \$1,900 and \$2,100 to the nursing home, which he declined to name.

Mother sick too

Last year, Mr Lee's mother suffered a stroke, which left the left side of her body paralysed.

"After her stroke, she needed consumables like diapers, medication and creams on top of one-time purchases like a wheelchair and a geriatric chair.

"We had to spend up to \$450 every two to three months on such supplies. On top of this, we employ a full-time maid to care for her at home," he said.

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Added Mr Lee, whose sisters have health problems of their own: "We don't own a car and we don't enjoy that many luxuries.

"In the past, we used to be able to take short holidays once in a while, but that is now a thing of the past."

Feeling the burden of caring for both his parents more than ever, he began to look for a cheaper nursing home for his father.

"After four years of paying the kind of fees to the nursing home, I began to feel it was too much. We needed something more sustainable in the long run.

"I also had concerns about the kind of care my father was receiving. During one of the visits, we noticed his clothes emitting a stench, suggesting they were not being cleaned properly," he said.

Mr Lee said he became more disappointed with the home after he was informed about a fall his father had only six hours after the incident took place.

So he began looking for a new home for his father in April.

"The cost was the main reason prompting me to look for another place. It was really too much to take," he said.

Sometime later, Mr Lee found the website of City Heart Care in Johor Baru. It charges \$900 a month for his father's stay.

"We wanted a more homely feel for our father, and a place which would give us confidence that he would be well taken care of.

"City Heart Care seemed clean and well maintained for a place that had been set up since 1993, and we sensed the passion of the owner for the job that he does," said Mr Lee.

Last month, Mr Lee moved his father into City Heart Care, which is a half-hour's drive from the Woodlands immigration checkpoint.

Since then, Mr Lee and his family have visited him three times.

He and his two sisters continue to live in their four-room HDB flat with their mother.

They look after her with the help of the maid.

"We do not own a car and taking my mother, who is wheelchair-bound, to visit my father is quite a challenge," he said.

In the long run, Mr Lee plans to visit his father once every two weeks.

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