

11/03/11

Dear Sir/Madam,

It would seem that the basic problems with care for the elderly are due to lack of good legislation.

What does care of the aged mean? I would think this is to create environments which cater to both the physical and emotional well being of the aged. The requirements that address these needs will probably increase with added ageing and can be managed in several ways.

First it would seem generally desirable that the elderly remain in their own homes for as long as possible. This means greater allocation of funds to provide support for this to happen. Such support should offer cleaning, shopping, meals, showering, washing and administration of medications. Meals are considered quite well catered for by meals on wheels. However, the other areas are very under funded and therefore of limited access or value. I recently met a lady who has been waiting since December for a fortnightly one and a half hour visit from someone to clean her floors. It is all very dependent on the resources of the various councils.

A second option is to enter a retirement village. What do they offer? It would seem that many such places only provide a bell and someone, not usually qualified, to answer it and make vital and quick medical decisions. Some villages describe themselves as resorts. It appears that while this is obviously an incentive for some to pay considerable sums of money to buy into such a place, when the need for greater support arises, as it generally does, then the only option is a nursing home.

There are other options for the aged such as the granny flat on the back of a relative's building or setting up a commune. However, these options require energy, money and time, not to mention the good intentions of those who set them in train.

As things currently stand, little is done by councils to assist the aged to remain in their own homes. While there are some church and charity organisations that run assisted living within retirement villages, many retirement villages offer very little by way of care. One even made promises to potential residents that there would be a nurse on call twenty four hours a day when there was never such a person.

Nothing will alter the existing problems until new legislation is introduced and while this may not be palatable to governments or councils I would respectfully suggest that this is really the only meaningful option.

If all retirement villages were required to offer assisted living as a part of their package the shortage of nursing home beds would be reduced. Sensible legislation could and should be introduced to prevent the manipulation of building requirements by developers. Greater support in various forms would allow the aged to live the last years of their lives in comfort and with dignity.

Yours faithfully,
Joanna van Kool