**New Year’s Resolution - Plan for Long Term Care**

According to some sources, 60% of us will need long term care sometime during our lives. It is important for all of us to prepare for that day when we will need to help loved ones with their care or we will need care for ourselves.

It is simply a fact of life to prepare financially for unexpected disasters by covering our homes, automobiles and health with insurance policies and to provide funding for our retirement. But no other life event can be as devastating to our lifestyle, finances and security as needing long term care. It drastically alters or completely eliminates the three principal retirement dreams of elderly Americans, which are:

1. Remaining independent in the home without intervention from others 2. Maintaining good health and receiving adequate health care 3. Having enough money for everyday needs and not outliving assets and income

Yet, it is our experience that the majority of the American public does not plan for the devastating crisis of needing long term care. This lack of planning also has an adverse effect on the older person's family, with sacrifices made in time, money, family lifestyles and even affecting the family's or caregiver's medical and emotional health.

Because of changing demographics and potential changes in government funding, the current generation -- more-than-ever -- needs to plan for long term care.

If you have spent time helping a parent or loved one cope with a disability resulting from aging, you know the frustration of balancing what you feel they need to do and what they want to do. Communication is strained at times, because after all, you are the child and they the parent, yet physically and mentally the roles have changed.

When you make directives, assignments and arrangements in advance of needing long term care, then everyone involved can follow the prearranged care plan.

As an example, a man named Jefferson Simpson wrote in his care plan that if dementia or Alzheimer's inhibited his mental abilities to communicate or recognize his surroundings, he wished to be in a respectable facility and only asked that he be visited and brought chocolates. To his children this request seemed silly at the time, but when his mental capacities did diminish, the instructions were there. No one had to wonder if they should try to take care of Father Jefferson at home and how they would do it. Without guilt or question they placed him in a respectable facility that took care of his needs. All they had to do was make loving visits, and of course they brought chocolates.

In order for Jefferson's simple request to happen, he had made financial, legal and personal long term care plans years before. What do you want your children or friends to do on your behalf? When it comes time for them to help, what if you can't say what you want because of a physical or mental disability? This is where a written long term care plan comes into effect.

Do you have a financial plan or long term care insurance? Retirement savings can disappear quickly when used for care services. Where is your paperwork, such as insurance policies, living will, medical directives, Armed Services discharge or disability papers? Is there someone designated to know the location?

What are the legal documents that are needed for power of attorney, estate planning and disbursement of assets? When do they have to be completed? What types of care services and facilities are available and what are the costs? What will government programs pay for and how do you qualify?

There is a lot you can do now to put together a plan for your own long term care. You may have limited resources in the future or health problems that will inhibit your ability to take care of things you could do now. For example:

James and Cindy want to be able to stay in their home as they age. In order to do this, when they were in their 40's they took out a long term care insurance policy that will pay for home care if it is needed. The policy will also pay for nursing home costs as a care option. With taking the policy at a younger age and in good health the monthly payments are low. Extra funds can now be put away for retirement without worries of having to deplete savings for care costs.

There is much to learn about long term care and there are a lot of new services and programs available from which to draw. For assistance in making your plans, please contact our office and schedule an appointment with one of our attorneys.