



MOVING MOM: CHOICE IN SENIORS' HOUSING



When Betty Sullivan's husband died last year, the 85-year-old hadn't lived alone in more than six decades. For three months, her three daughters took turns staying with her each and every night.

"Although I appreciated having them with me, it wasn't fair to them and their families," says the feisty Sullivan.

Her five children suggested a seniors' independent living residence.

Once the decision was made to put her home on the market, selling for the most money, in the shortest time and with the least amount of inconvenience were important considerations.

It's been over a year since Sullivan moved into independent living at Maple Residences in Steveston.

"I don't have to cook, clean or strip my bed ... it's all included in my rent," she adds. "There's great entertainment every

week such as bridge, bingo, exercise classes, billiards as well as different outings."

Like Sullivan's children, many boomers are being faced with having to make decisions about their aging parents' housing options. As our lifespan increases, many seniors are able to remain independent for many years; others will require assistance of some sort. Planning what housing makes the most sense for your parent—whether it's stay home with care, buying into a condominium complex that caters to seniors, assisted living or independent living in a private residence—should be discussed with respect, dignity and understanding, says Eileen Campbell, leasing administrator at The Maple Residences, a nonprofit independent living residence in the heart of Steveston. "The key thing is that the parent needs to be involved in the decision-making process as much

as possible because for many seniors it's such a life changing event that it can seem frightening," she adds.

First off, Campbell suggests you have the conversation with your parent sooner rather than later.

"It might be hard to start the conversation, but don't wait until a sickness or a bad fall occurs before you discuss what your parent wants and what they need," she adds.

In addition, some people might encounter real resistance to independent or even assisted living, because many seniors remember the horrors of the nursing homes of decades past.

"Times have changed and seniors' residences are definitely not what they use to be," says Campbell.

Elizabeth Ho, general manager at Gilmore Gardens, a private retirement

community of rental suites, agrees.

Minimizing the number of moves is also important, but at the same time recognize how hard it is for anyone to move. The emotional ties to personal belongings and the idea of getting rid of them are very real concerns to seniors.

"Moving too quickly to downsizing can have a huge negative effect on a senior's health," says Ho. "First off, find out what is most important to them. Is moving closer to the family important if they never see the family, or are they better in a neighbourhood where they have friends and a good social network?"

For more information, call SeniorsBC.ca toll free at 1-800-465-4911 or visit www.seniorsbc.ca/housing; or call the BC Seniors Living Association toll free at 1-888-402-2722 or online at www.bcsla.ca.