

Chair of Elder Care Section of NYS Bar Association Worries Coming Elder Care Crisis Might Be the Next Willowbrook

NEW YORK, NY - September 8, 2000-According to Bernard A. Krooks, Chair of the New York State Bar Association's Elder Law Section and Vice President and Fellow of the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys (NAELA), the current crisis in providing care for the elderly is just the beginning. As the baby boomers age, the crisis will become even deeper and more difficult to solve. While many people are staying healthier as they age, those who do become ill and infirm must be cared for, and the number in that population can only be expected to grow.

It has been estimated that by 2030 some 5.3 million people will enter a nursing home. That is over three times the number of people who now require nursing home care-and that does not even touch the issue of length of stay, now averaging between 1-2 years, which is likely to rise as more life-lengthening medications are developed.

Assisted living facilities are one way to ease the pressure when people are not well enough to live on their own, but too healthy for nursing homes. Again, cost is the greatest factor. In Florida, one can find such facilities for about \$2,000 per month; in New York the cost is at least double.

At the same time, the number of hours of occupational, physical and speech therapy paid for by Medicare and other insurers is being cut, making it less likely that individuals who have suffered debilitating strokes and other illnesses will be able to return to a functional level that will allow them to resume a more independent life style. The current debate over the cost of prescription drugs and who should pay for them will not be resolved easily, either, despite all of the attention the presidential election has brought to the matter.

Home care may be an option, but this era of two working partners makes it less available than in the past, unless outside help is available, such as through an insurance policy providing long term care. But these policies cost thousands of dollars each year, making them out of reach for many.

All of us deserve a dignified old age, where we have good, compassionate care. If we don't stop and do something about it now, nursing homes may be the next Willowbrook.

Mr. Krooks is Chair of the New York State Bar Association's Elder Law Section and Vice President and Fellow of the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys (NAELA).