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## Bringing health care home

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Photo: Courtesy

### SAJIDA Foundation's geriatric care facility hopes transform elderly care

Often times the ones who took care of us when we were growing up, carried us on their shoulders, and sheltered us from the world, end up needing the most care during their golden years. They are often hesitant to ask for assistance and the helping hand they require from time to time. Ordinarily, this is the moment loved ones should step in and try to provide the assistance the elderly need, yet they are often unable for a variety of reasons.

Bangladesh is rapidly developing and so is the socio-economic structure. While families in the olden days were bigger and clustered together, today, families have become smaller, many have dual-income households, not to mention families that are opting to settle abroad.

While this process of evolution of the household structure is a natural response to changing socio-economic environment, the resulting breakdown of family units, more often than not, puts the elderly members of the household in a vulnerable position.

According to World Health Organization, a person above the age of 60 is considered as an elderly. And while some are perfectly healthy and functioning at 80, others may require closer monitoring at 65.

However, due to a lack of proper awareness and care efforts towards the old, this group of people are often left in the shadows as the family and the economy both struggle to understand how to properly cater to needs of the elderly.

Occupying a rather small corner of a room, Golam Kobir (name changed for privacy protection), who was once a decorated citizen of the country, now lives in a shelter home for the aged.

"I have been living in this shelter for a couple of years now, after my son moved abroad with his wife. They couldn't take me, but I am happy for them. I get letters from my son every now and then, and very recently they sent me pictures of my grandson! Some days I miss my children, but most days I am happy," says Golam Kobir.

There are many others like Kobir, who get left behind, often for a better opportunity or a better lifestyle for their carer. It's not always done by choice, but rather for necessity. While the economy grows, so does the cost of living and the need for a better life, which often leads to both members of a household opting to work outside. In cases like these, the elderly are left behind to fend for themselves or left in the care of the help who are neither medically trained, nor fit to provide proper geriatric care.

However, efforts are becoming more visible over recent years to focus health care services on the wellbeing of the elderly. August 21 is World Senior Citizen's Day, meant as a reminder to prioritize the needs of those who have given their best years to tirelessly ensure a future for the generations that came after them.

Not only does this day help shine the light on the elders of the society, but also focuses on the growing issues that are facing this vulnerable group. There are elders who are too old for regular hospital visits, and too weak to spend hours in traffic during an emergency. Yet for the elderly, continuous care, often including medical support, is of utmost importance. The challenges surrounding the provision of continuous health care in such cases, begs the question whether continuous quality health services be brought to them at home.

Efforts of SAJIDA Foundation, a non-government organization based in Bangladesh, has proven that healthcare must be inclusive, accessible for all and can indeed be delivered to the home. 'Elder Care' is among the Foundation's many innovative and successful initiatives to ensure health, happiness and dignity for all.

Elder Care provides support to families who are unable to give adequate time and attention to their loved ones, and in their stead, provide care with compassion through trained caregivers to the elderly.

Owing to SAJIDA's extensive experience in providing hospital-based services through SAJIDA Hospitals, the Foundation is able to ensure quality of care, qualified healthcare professionals and expertise as well as the required resources to provide not only basic care, but also medical care, where needed.

Categorized under three levels, care packages under Elder Care help cater to the different needs of the elderly. Level 1 caregivers assist clients with their day to day activities like feeding, bathing, giving clients their medication, etc. Level 2 involves certified nurses or paramedics experienced in tube feeding, IV medication, catheter care, and trained with sufficient knowledge in handling special health needs. Level 3 caregivers are skilled nurses ready to address emergencies and provide critical care to post-hospitalized patients who need help and support in getting back to normal life.

"Our program is more than just providing healthcare to the elderly; it is about providing our clients with a sense of safety and support when they are at their most vulnerable. This is because we believe that caring for the elderly is not only our responsibility as human beings, but also their right, for all they have done to make our lives better," said Taslima, a caregiver with Elder Care.

SAJIDA's Elder Care program is providing many families the opportunity to ensure in-home care for the elders – a service that has transformed lives of not only the elderly who avail the service, but for the entire family.

Although geriatric care is still an unfamiliar concept in the country, SAJIDA Foundation is working to fill a gap and providing much-needed services with the hope that with continuous efforts and proper education, the benefit will reach the vulnerable elderly people.

*For more information on Elder Care or to avail Elder Care services, visit: [sajidafoundation.org/programs/elder-care/](http://sajidafoundation.org/programs/elder-care/)*

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