



What Will the Future Look Like for Assisted Living After the Worst of the Pandemic

**By Rusty Blix, Founder
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We hear through media that an effective vaccination needs to be available before everyone will be safe and the virus emergency is behind us. It would be great if an effective vaccine were developed, but experts say that there is no guarantee that one will ever be available. Viruses like the common flu virus tend to keep mutating genetically, so that a modified flu vaccine (with a certain amount of guess work) is provided each year. Typically flu vaccines are only effective for 50 to 60% percent of the viruses which seem to come each winter season. A vaccine has never been developed for the HIV virus! There are many questions which remain to be answered!

All of us, including senior citizens, need to get back to life somewhat like we have been used to living. As an owner of Alderman Oaks Retirement Center I interact with many senior citizens and can say without hesitation that they are more frustrated than most of us as they have been locked down very much tighter for almost three months as this is being written. No visitors! No outings! No gathering together! No communal dining! No group activities! No family visitations!

How can we move forward now without a vaccination? It is my opinion that the most likely solution will be that described by some as "the herd" solution. In effect this means that most individuals in a society as a whole must obtain immunity for the virus through being positive at some time or having enough contact with the virus to develop immunity without experiencing the symptoms of coronavirus. There is also a reasonable possibility that the Coronavirus will gradually become less potent as a result of the constant process of mutation.

The "lowering of the curve" that we have heard so much about really only extends the process of the herd solution in a way that our medical community can keep up with providing the appropriate care as the virus continues to spread. The demographic which would experience the most danger with this process is, according to statistics, the older demographic.

As this herd immunity progresses through the community the likelihood of new cases and carriers will eventually decline dramatically. Only at that point will the danger to seniors be significantly diminished. Until that time, it is important that seniors and their families be very diligent in protecting themselves. While the broader society seems to be ignoring many of the suggested precautions, seniors need to stay very vigilant.



My thought process brings two other questions to mind. How will we know when it is safe for seniors and how will we keep them safe (relatively) until that time?

As for us knowing when it will be safe for seniors to resume their normal activities, I think the testing for active COVID-19 will need to show that the percentage of people in the general population that are actually positive and potential disease spreaders is near zero. This doesn't mean that everybody would have had the virus, but it does probably mean that a significant number of our population has. At this point, the odds of a senior who has not ever been exposed to the COVID-19 being exposed would be close to zero as well. There is also potential that a dependable anti-body test will be developed, but up to now all the candidates for anti-body testing have proven unreliable. Also, this herd approach relies on the unproven theory that people cannot be re-infected after having the virus the first time.

There are other possible ways to reach the place where seniors could feel comfortable out in the general community (again other than for the "herd" solution). Medications like hydroxychloroquine might prove to prevent infection. Prophylactics (meds to treat a disease) might be perfected so that the danger of dying or long-lasting negative effects may become minimal. Any of these developments or a very effective, proven vaccine could make the "herd" solution totally unnecessary.

I believe that seniors will always need to remain vigilant, using the best proven procedures like washing hands, distancing from anyone with virus-related symptoms, and having a mask available in case any situation makes them uncomfortable. New outbreaks could also occur requiring a certain amount of isolation again, but our senior demographic cannot wait much longer for developments in medical science.

In closing, we recently received exciting news that state-mandated COVID-19 testing for Staff and Residents (optional) of Alderman Oaks by the Florida Department of Health on May 31, 2020 revealed no positive COVID-19 cases.

Bio of Darwin "Rusty" Blix

Rusty is the founder of Alderman Oaks Retirement Center, Inc., an Independent/Assisted Living Facility in Sarasota, FL. Alderman Oaks opened in 1997 and Rusty still is very active daily.

Prior to designing and developing Alderman Oaks twenty-three years ago, Rusty was a general contractor for 30 years, licensed to build any structure in the State of Florida. Before that Rusty worked in an economic evaluation department for Dow Chemical Co. He earned a bachelor's degree and master's degree in Chemical Engineering at Cornell University. He has been married 49 years and has two children, one who is a Doctor of Nursing Practice, working in an infectious disease group.