

Spousal Involvement in Long-Term Care Transitions: A Comparative Case Study

Renante Ignacio, MD, FACP, AGSF, CMD • Emmanuel Ignacio, BSHS
rignacio@geriatricpalliative.com



Key Takeaway: Spousal involvement may be a key determinant of successful LTC transitions, influencing caregiver distress, relationship continuity, and patient adjustment.

Background & Methods

Transitions from the home to long-term care (LTC) settings frequently occur in older adults experiencing progressive cognitive or functional decline. For spouses, the placement may result in several factors: emotional separation, loss of caregiving identity, loneliness, and even grief. These challenges are particularly pronounced in dementias, where spouses often provide structure, emotional support, and continuity of care daily. Despite the importance of the role of family caregivers, little is known about how caregiver involvement during the placement process influences the adjustment for both the patient and the spouse. This study involved 2 older adults who have transitioned to long-term care (1 has since deceased) and 2 spousal caregivers were identified through a retrospective chart review. In obtaining data, semi-structured interviews were utilized for the participants, using both individual and couple interviews. Once data was obtained, thematic analysis was used to identify major themes and member checking was utilized to verify data integrity.

Objective: To examine how spousal involvement influences caregiver and patient experiences during the transition to long-term care.

Findings

- Spousal involvement may play an important role in adjustment during LTC transition
- Engagement may help preserve caregiver identity and emotional connection
- Limited involvement may contribute to caregiver distress and disrupted continuity of care
- LTC facilities should consider structured opportunities for caregiver participation and communication

Clinical Implications

- Encourage caregiver participation during admission and care planning
- Facilitate regular communication and foster trust between facility staff and spouses
- Develop family centered-transition protocols
- Promote continuity of relationships during institutional care

Future Directions

Larger qualitative and mixed methods studies are needed to identify effective and scalable approaches for integrating family caregivers into institutional care.

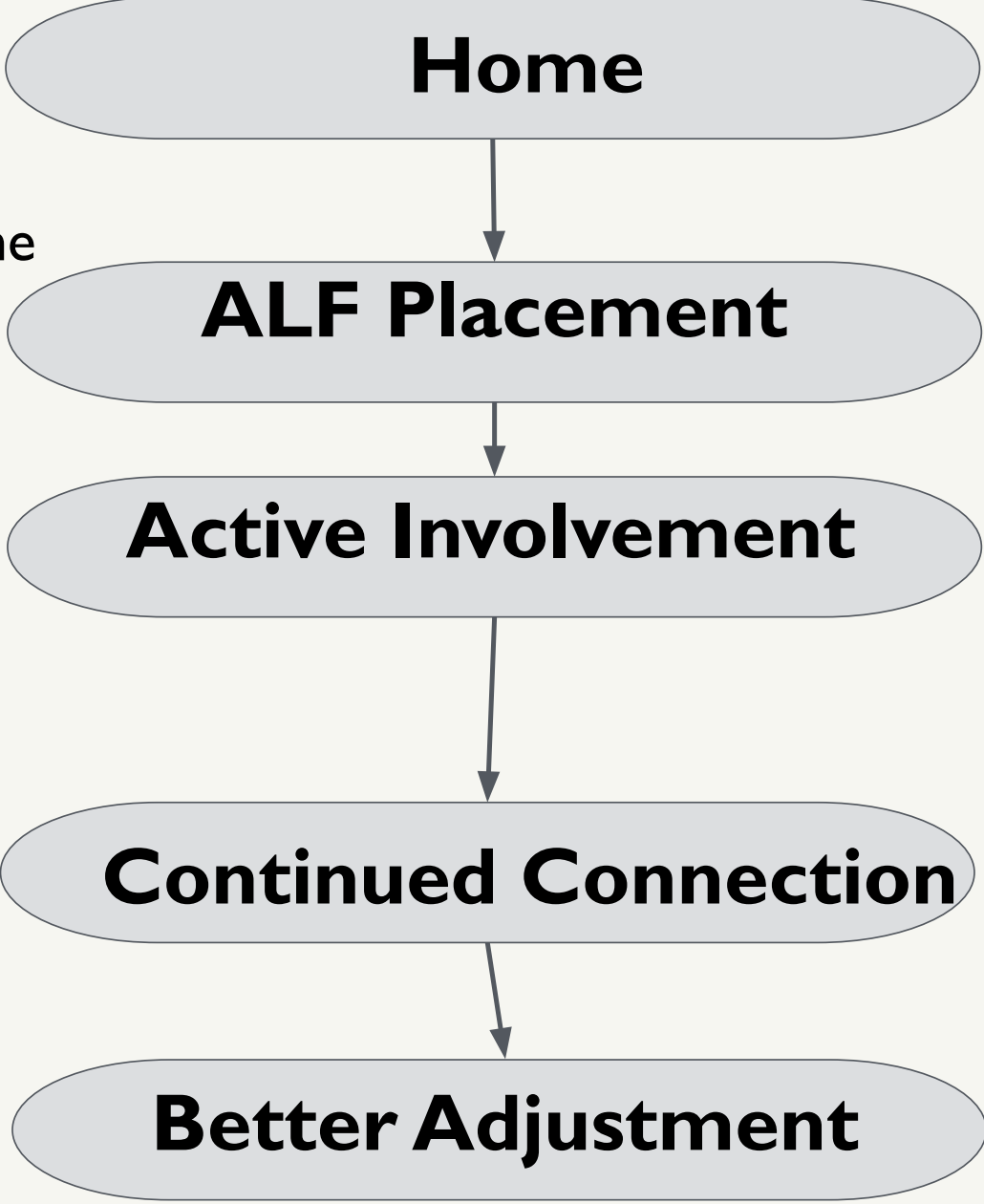
Case I - Engagement

- Patient**
- 80 year old male
 - Progressive frailty
 - Transitioned to assisted living
- Circumstances**
- Wife unable to continue caregiving at home
 - Placement planned and coordinated
- Caregiver Involvement**
- Frequent communication with facility staff
 - Ongoing involvement in daily care
 - Regular visitation

“I thought it was too much of a challenge for her to take care of me...she had some health issues so I thought it best to maybe seek other arrangements”

Figure 2B. 80 year old patient

Figure 2A. Timeline



Case II - Exclusion

- Patient**
- 82 year old male
 - Dementia
 - Transitioned to skilled nursing facility
- Circumstances**
- Rapid decline
 - Spouse hospitalized
 - COVID-19 restrictions
- Caregiver Involvement**
- Limited communication
 - Restricted participation
 - Reduced caregiving role
 - Limited access during transition

“No, it was difficult and lonely, I didn’t like to be separated from him, but the doctor said that if I did not bring him, I may have passed away before him”

Figure 2D. Widow of 82 year old patient

Figure 2C. Timeline

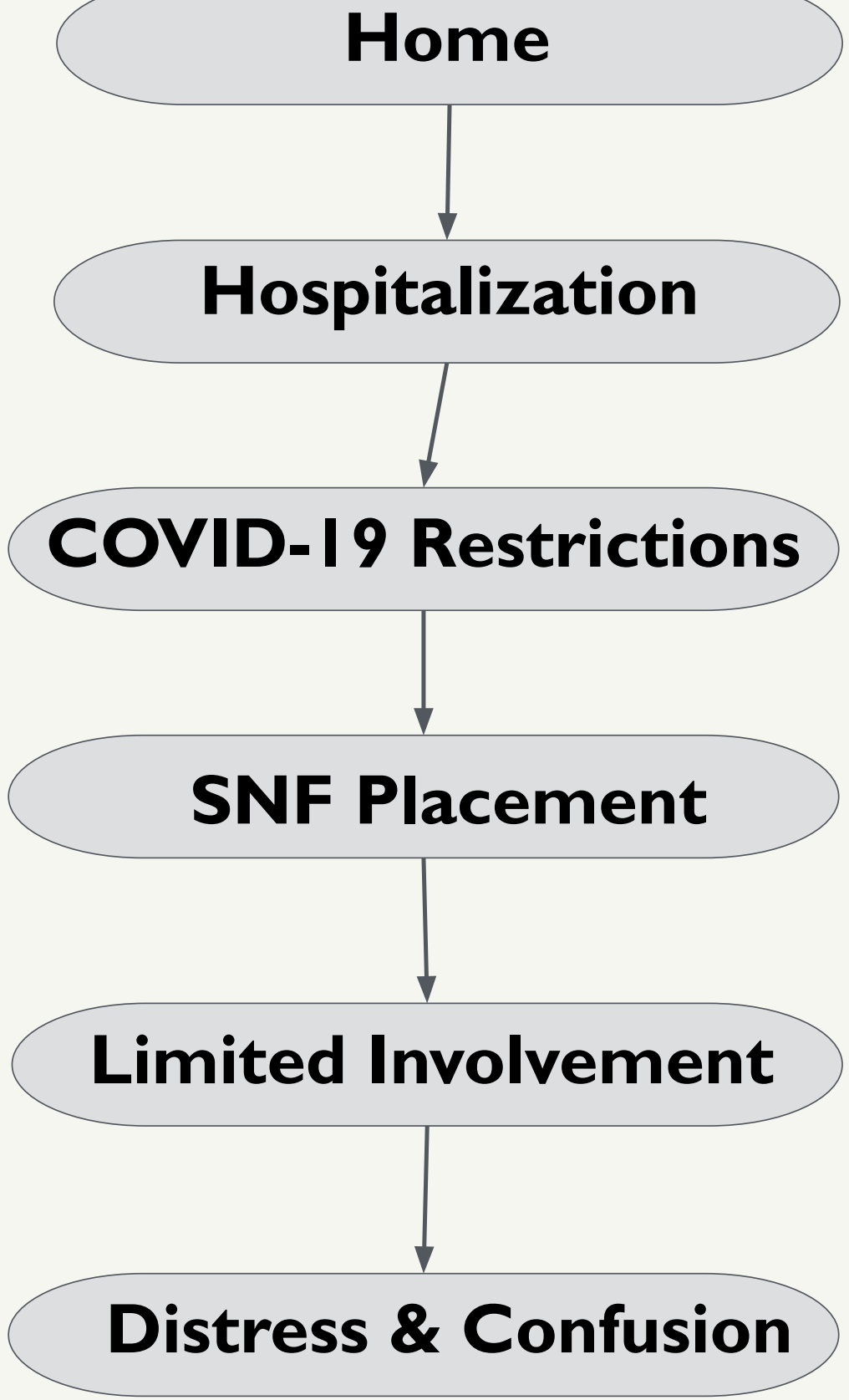
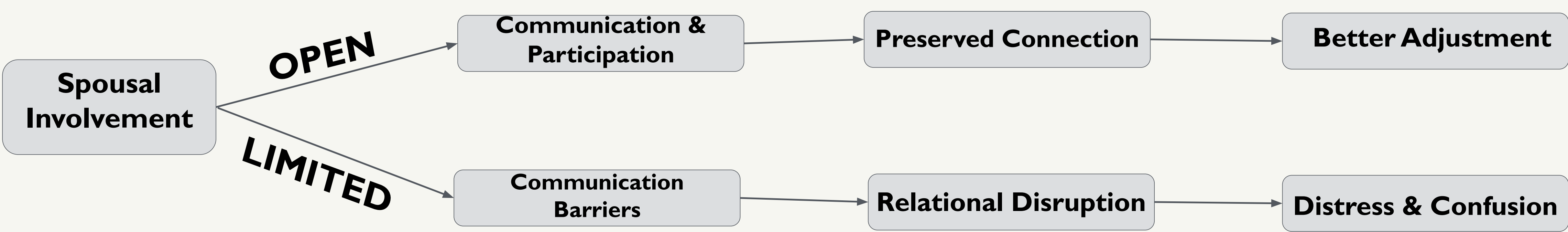


Figure 3. Comparative Findings & Engagement vs Exclusion Pathway

Domain	Engagement	Exclusion
Communication	✓	✗
Participation	✓	✗
Emotional Connection	Preserved	Disrupted
Caregiver/Spousal Experience	Connected	Distressed
Patient Adjustment	Better	Worse



References

1. Ahlström G, Markeling NS, Liljenberg U, Rosén H. Breaking Up and a New Beginning When One's Partner Goes into a Nursing Home: An Interview Study. Healthcare (Basel). 2021;9(6):672. Published 2021 Jun 4. doi:10.3390/healthcare9060672
2. Groenvynck L, Fakha A, de Boer B, et al. Interventions to Improve the Transition From Home to a Nursing Home: A Scoping Review. Gerontologist. 2022;62(7):e369-e383. doi:10.1093/geront/gnab036
3. Kaldy J. Working Together to Help Couples Growing Old Apart. Caring for the Ages. 2025. Accessed December 31, 2025. [https://www.caringfortheages.com/article/S1526-4114\(25\)00134-9/fulltext](https://www.caringfortheages.com/article/S1526-4114(25)00134-9/fulltext)
4. Piel J, Robra B-P. “We never lived together either”: Couples' housing (re-)arrangements in later life. J Aging Stud. 2023;67:101190. doi:10.1016/j.jaging.2023.101190