

What to Consider When Choosing a Nursing Home

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Overview

- Overarching questions:
 - Would I want this place to be my new home?
 - Can I see the person I am caring for living here?

Adapted from Bet Tzedek Legal Services and National Senior Law Center, *Nursing Home Companion* (2003), and Kane R.L. and Ouellette J. (2011). *The Good Caregiver*. New York, New York. Penguin Press.

Location

- Can the resident's caregivers, family members, partners, neighbors and friends easily navigate to the facility?
- Is it close to the resident's former home?
- Is it close to the resident's religious institution?

Residents

- Are the residents' clothes clean?
 - Appropriate for the time of day?
 - For the season of the year?
- Are they clean shaven?
 - Hair combed?
 - Nails clipped?
- Do they appear happy and content?
- Does it appear that their needs for durable medical equipment (e.g. wheelchairs, walkers) is being appropriately met?
- What do current residents say about the nursing home?

Residents' Rooms

- Are rooms clean and quiet?
- Do they have windows that open?
 - Air conditioning? Individual thermostats?
- Do they have a locked space for personal items?
- Are rooms decorated by the residents?
- Are call buttons easily reached from the bed?
- Is there enough closet space?
- Is there a private phone available?
- Is there a television available?
- How many beds are in one room?

Bathrooms

- Do residents have private baths and showers?
 - If there is a communal/shared shower, are there areas for privacy?
- Do bathrooms have grab bars near toilets and bathtubs?
- Are there working call buttons?
- Are doors wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs?
- Are bathrooms clean?
 - Do they have adequate sanitary supplies?

Food

- Are the dining room and kitchen clean?
- Do staff assist residents who cannot feed themselves?
- Does the food taste, smell, and look good?
- Can residents choose their food?
 - Are choices consistent with cultural and other preferences?
 - Do they provide food that adheres to special diets?
- Can residents bring their own food?
 - Will the facility store it?
- How is food made available between mealtimes?
- Are drinks, including water, always available?

Cultural Environment

- Does the facility pay attention to customs and traditions such as special foods, holiday celebrations, or special festivals?
- How do they share and support differences in customs and traditions?
 - Is there a specific emphasis on a given culture?
 - Do most of the residents come from one group?
- Do they organize programs around specific cultures and related practices or events?
- Do any staff speak the native language of the potential resident?

Staff

- Do employees know residents by name and address them respectfully?
- Do they have enough time to care for residents?
- Are staff regularly assigned to the same residents?
- Do staff smile at one another and the residents?
- Is the person in charge of the facility open to your questions and requests?
- Do they welcome the involvement of caregivers, family, partners, friends, and other visitors?

Staff (continued)

- How long have staff members worked for the facility?
- Are they responsive to resident requests?
- Can residents pick their own roommate?
 - How do staff treat married residents?
- How many hours/day is a registered nurse present?
- How many hours/day is a licensed practical nurse present?
- How many times/week does the facility's doctor visit?

Services and Programs

- Does a licensed social worker perform social work services?
- Does the home have a resident council or family council?
- Do they offer religious services?
- Do community-based organizations and groups visit?
- Does the facility have technology available for resident use?
- Is web-based monitoring used or permitted?
- Are there quiet areas for residents?

Services and Programs (continued)

- Is wheelchair-accessible transportation available for residents who want to participate in activities outside the facility?
- Does the facility organize activities and field trips that take into account residents' interests and preferences?
- Are there private areas for residents to meet visitors or doctors?
- Is it safe for residents to go outside?
 - Can they have a garden?
- Does the facility provide therapy in a separate room?

Dementia Care

- Are there special care units/separate areas for those with late stage dementia?
 - What are the criteria for entry into these areas?
- What training do staff in these units receive?
- What is different about the care given in these units?
 - Do staff treat residents respectfully?
 - Are staff able to describe the person's interests and abilities over time?
 - Do residents look clean and appropriately dressed?

Dementia Care (continued)

- Are residents restrained or secluded in other ways?
- Are residents permitted to leave the unit or area? If they are locked in, how is that handled?
- Are bed alarms used?
- Do the residents seem overmedicated?
 - Are residents required to eat, sleep, drink and take medications at the same times?
 - Is their speech slurred or do residents seem tired?

Opinions of Others

- What do caregivers, family members, partners, neighbors and friends say?
- Does the potential resident's doctor have an opinion about the facility?
- Is the doctor willing to visit the resident at the facility?

Payment

- How many of the residents are covered by Medicare or by Medicaid?
- What changes will occur if the resident transitions to Medicaid?
- Does the facility work with the resident's health care organization?
- What is the daily rate?
- What "extra charges" are not included in the daily rate, e.g., laundry?
- Is a deposit required? (A deposit cannot be required if the resident's care will be covered by Medicare and/or Medicaid.)

Public Record

- What does the report say on [Nursing Home Compare](#)?
 - Can you view inspection reports at the facility?
- What violations, if any, have been found by the local licensing and certification agency?
 - [Federal Nursing Home Regulations & State Laws](#)
 - [Nursing Home Certification & Compliance](#)
 - Has the facility lost its license or federal certification?
- Have any lawsuits been filed against the facility?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Resources

- The [**Alzheimer's Association – In My Community**](#): provides information and checklists about nursing homes in your area.
- **Aging and Disability Resource Centers**: offered by many states.
- **Nursing home report cards**: check to see if your state provides them.