

Tips to help choose a Nursing Home

Adapted from The Alzheimer's Association booklet - Residential Care – A guide for Choosing A New Home (copyright 1998, reprinted 2003)

When the time comes for a person with Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia to move into a residential care setting (e.g. group home, assisted living, nursing home, etc.) it can be very difficult for both the person and the family. In addition, finding the right residential care setting to meet the needs of the person with dementia (PWD) can be challenging and time consuming.

These are some *ideas* to help the family/caregiver to know what to ask and look for when choosing a place that provides quality care.

Plan:

- Determine the needs of the person with dementia;
- What type of supervision is necessary – 24 hour, some assistance with daily activities
- Does the person have communication difficulties, toileting problems, bathing assistance, help walking, and help with medications
- What types of social interaction do you want
- Do you need a specialized Alzheimer's unit
- How will you cover costs

Decide on the type of setting: **Residential Care**

When home care is unsafe or not possible, a person with dementia may move to a residential care facility. Some people simply need a few days or weeks of residential care after a hospital stay.

Other people need long-term care. Long-term care facilities include assisted living facilities and nursing homes. These facilities offer different types of services, explained below. Understanding what they offer will help you decide which long-term care facility is best.

The names for different kinds of facilities differ from state to state. Different states also have different licensing rules. Licensing helps ensure that a facility can safely care for a person with dementia.

Housing Only: Generally independent living- May be suitable for a person with dementia who is in the early stages and lives with a caregiver
There is generally no assistance with medications. Staff may have limited training or no training in dementia. Not licensed by the state.

Assisted Living/Group Home:

Staff will have different levels of skill and knowledge-Some will be licensed by the state. Some assisted livings are small 4 or more beds. Some have certified memory units specifically for patients with dementia. There is generally little or no financial assistance available. State laws and regulations require certain assisted living services. These may include but are not limited to the following.

- 24-hour awake staff to provide oversight and meet scheduled and unscheduled needs
- Provision and oversight of personal and supportive services
- Health-related services
- Social services
- Recreational activities
- Meals
- Housekeeping and laundry
- Transportation

A person may not be able to live through -out the entire disease progression in this type of facility.

24 Hour Care with Skilled Nursing services:

These settings provide room and board with 24-hour staff and care. Resident rooms may be private or shared and some settings have special units that care exclusively for persons with dementia. Skilled care (I.e. Care provided by a licensed nurse) is available 24 hours a day and most settings will be able to care for persons who require significant care.

Staff patient ratio will vary

Settings of this type may be appropriate for persons in the middle, late, and stages of the disease.

There are some settings that provide all of the different types of options described above. These settings are called Continuing Care Retirement Communities (CCRC)

You or a representative should make at least one visit to the facility. Look for a residential care setting that is committed to providing care to persons with dementia. Ask staff questions and look for indications of the type of care provide. Use the following questions to help:

What to ask and look for:

Approach to Alzheimer/Dementia Care

Ask

- What is the programs mission and philosophy?
- Will progression of the disease result in transfer or discharge from the program, unit and or care setting?
- What type of care is provided for persons with late stage dementia
- How are issues and concerns resolved

Look For

- A copy of the most recent survey (Licensed setting)
- List of resident's rights

- ***Assessment and Care/Service Plans***

Ask

- How are care/service plans created and reviewed ?- *Family members and the PWD (when able) should be included in the process/v*
- How are changes of condition monitored and addressed? - *Examples included falls injuries illness and changes in behaviors, nutritional intake and medications*
- How are families notified of care needs and changes?

Look For

- Residents being allowed to make simple decisions or choices
- Staff treating residents as unique individuals
- Families talking to and asking staff questions.
- What kind assistance is provided specifically for persons with dementia?

- Providing simple directions, limiting choices, cueing are e.g. of simple answers to listen for.

Care approaches

Ask

- How do you work with behaviors? What is your policy regarding the use of physical restraints?
- Is medication used to control behaviors? If yes how is the need for medication identified and monitored?
- How are adequate nutrition and hydration assured and what is the cost

Look For

- Clean and well groomed residents
- Residents smiling and looking comfortable
- Staff talking kindly
- Appetizing food
- Staff encouraging residents to do things for themselves within their scope
- Copy of the monthly or weekly menu

Activities

- How often are organized activities offered?
- Are there organized activities during the evenings and or weekends
- Where do these activities take place_ Places should include inside facility, outdoors and off grounds, when appropriate? For example, outings to restaurants shopping concerts museum etc.
- How are activities specifically designed for persons with dementia “Activities should be individualized and meet the specific needs, interest and abilities of each individual?”

Staff qualifications

Ask

- What training does staff receive: *it should include special training in Alzheimer/dementia care.*
- How often does staff receive training?
- How many residents is each direct care staff member responsible for? *This will help you determine how much individual attention your family member will receive.*
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Look For

- Friendliness of staff towards you, residents, visitors and each other
- Genuineness of staff interactions with residents and family members
- Staff addressing residents by name prepared
- Staff appearing content, not unhappy or overly stressed.

Environmental Support

Ask

- What security measures are in place; examples secure doors, safety features in the bathrooms and hallways, lighting and then monitoring devices
- Are there safe areas that allow for independent wandering
- Is there an outdoor area for residents that are safe and secure?
- How does the environment promote independence? Examples include cues in the environment that help locate key areas, or identify the time of day.

Look For

- A pleasing atmosphere in dining area
- Personal belongings decorating resident rooms
- Residents moving about freely in a safe area
- Pleasant smells, (i.e. coffee brewing, popcorn smelling fragrances, aroma therapy)
- Clutter free hallways
- Appropriate noise levels

Choosing the right place

- Before making your final choice revisit the care setting unannounced. Go at a different time from your first visit
- During this visit: Walk through the unit and make observations. Take your time and get a feel for everything discussed previously.

Other tips

- Place the person on a waiting list(if available)
- Stay in touch with admissions staff
- Have all Medicare paperwork completed (if using)
- Transitions and change can be difficult for all involved. Approach the transition in a positive light.
- Share information about the upcoming move based on the person's ability to understand
- Involve the PWD to try and make him/her feel useful and helpful.
- Decorate his/her room with personal belongings before the admission day.
- Try not to let your fear and sadness show
- Find support from friends, family and/or by attending organized support groups become a member of family council
- Ask friends and family members to share positive thoughts about the move with the person and with you.
- Care for yourself by doing things that you enjoy
- Relax rest and refresh yourself.
- Keep the lines of communication open with the residential care setting
- Continually share with the staff providing care techniques you have found that work well
- Attend regularly scheduled care/service planning meetings
- Evaluate the care he/she s receiving and communicate any concerns to the appropriate people.

No placement has to be permanent. If you are unhappy with a care setting and cannot resolve your concerns, look for another place that will meet the needs