

How To Choose a Nursing Home

Contributed by Denise M. Clark

No one likes the thought of having to live in an assisted living facility, but there may come a time when it becomes necessary. None of us want to be a burden to our children, but we do know that someday, we will all have to face a choice. At what point is it necessary to choose a nursing home?

In some areas of the United States and around the world, it is the custom for elderly parents and relatives to remain with family members. However, due to financial constraints, responsibilities and other factors, more seniors today are facing the fact that they may have to make that decision sooner rather than later, especially if healthcare is a factor.

When it comes time to start considering choosing a nursing home, there are several points to keep in mind. It is up to you, if possible, or other family members to know what to look for and how to adequately judge a nursing home in the appearance, procedures and care they offer. Some of the most important factors to consider:

- Check out the credentials of any facility you look at. The nursing home should have credentials and a state license. Are financial services and counseling available to help sort through questions and issues regarding Medicare and Medicaid? Another important consideration is whether the facility offers certified Medicare and Medicaid programs.

- Take a look at the staff members. That includes nurses as well as Certified Nursing Aids working on the floor. Do they appear happy? Do they look stressed and impatient? Are they helpful in answering questions? Find out how many nurses, both RN's and LPN's are staffed, as well as the ratio of aides to patients. Remember, it's the nursing aides who perform most of the hands-on care for patients. Also ask if a nurse and doctor are always on call or in the building.

- Check out the dining facilities and the food menu. As the administrator of the facility to supply you with a sample menu. Usually, these are printed out for the entire month. Check out the dining room. Is it clean? Friendly? Does it allow social interaction between residents? If you really want to determine the quality of the food, purchase a meal for yourself and see.

- What kinds of services are offered at the nursing home? Does it offer rehabilitation and physical therapy services? Are church services offered for residents of different religious denominations? Is a beautician or barber on staff, or do such services cost extra? What about laundry? What about activities and outside excursions? These services should be offered at any nursing home, but some charge an extra fee for them, while others don't. Make sure to find out.

- Look at the residents. Are they clean and well dressed? Is their hair combed and their clothes clean? Are they involved in activities or sitting around bored? While some residents choose not to be involved in various activities, ask whether they are available.

- Is the nursing home "senior-friendly"? Is it equipped with handrails? Do the bathrooms have grab rails? Are call

buttons in every room?

There are many things to consider when seeking a nursing home for yourself or your loved one. These suggestions offer only a basic list of considerations to keep in mind when you begin your search.

Finding the right nursing home may take some time, but it's not something that you want to rush. Don't feel embarrassed or hesitant to ask a nursing or assisted living care administrator anything you feel is necessary in order to obtain the answers you need to make the decision. Deciding that you or a loved one needs the care provided by a nursing home is a difficult decision, one that comes with a lot of emotional weight, so take your time and get every question answered before you make that decision.