



HOW TO CHOOSE A NURSING HOME FOR YOUR LOVED ONE: SELECTION PROCESS AND AFTER ADMISSION

Are you facing the important and often difficult decision of placing your loved one in a nursing home? If you are, it is a good idea to do some homework first, to make sure you choose the right facility. The best opportunity for a successful experience is in knowing what to look for.

This booklet will lead you through the process of selecting a facility and provide you with helpful information after your loved one is admitted to the facility. The guide is designed to help you:

- Learn what kind of questions to ask
- Find the criteria that reflect a quality nursing home
- Rate and score the prospects

It is important for families to have a positive attitude towards this experience. Family members can reassure their loved ones by helping them overcome the fear of losing their independence and cope with the reality of needing to reside in a nursing home.

PART I: SELECTION PROCESS

Locate a nursing home in the vicinity of your home or workplace, or in a location that is close enough for frequent visits, if possible.

One of the most important functions as a family member is visitation and involvement in the delivery of the care plan. It is also critical that at least one member of your family lives close enough to the facility to visit on a regular basis.

If it is not possible to place your loved one in a facility close to home, you may search for nursing homes in a particular location through Nursing Home Compare (<http://www.medicare.gov/NHCompare>). This tool, which provides detailed information on nursing homes that are Medicare or Medicaid certified, is searchable by city, state, county and zip code.

It is suggested that you make surprise visits and visit at different times, including weekends or evenings. If possible, visit any facility you're interested in at least twice before making a decision.

Once you have located a few facilities based on your desired location, print a copy of this booklet to take with you on the visit. And, be sure to take notes about what you see and hear.

Find a facility that offers the following "Four R's" criteria:

- **Recovery services** to support recovery from a recent illness, with the plan to discharge your loved one

- back to the community.
- **Restoration services** to support a chronic disease and the need for greater functionality and independence.
- **Rehabilitation services** to initiate and carry out a treatment plan that will eventually discharge the patient to a lower level of dependence, either back home or to an assisted living facility.
- **Reintegration services** to assist the recovering or rehabilitated patient to adjust to returning home or to a lower level of care.

Find a facility that will be willing to provide you with a care plan (you are entitled to see the care plan if you are power of attorney). A care plan should include the following:

- Diagnostics on the medical cause of the problem
- List of problems to be addressed
- List of treatment programs to be implemented and a schedule for treatment
- Complete list of tasks to be done for each program and the expected staff function to carry out the task
- Schedule for carrying out the task and duration of the interventions together with expected outcomes
- Estimate of the cost of care for the expected duration of the episode

Find a facility that:

- Will invite you to care plan meetings and therapy sessions
- Will keep you informed on progress in implementing the care plan
- Will keep your physician informed on progress being made in carrying out his or her orders
- Has RN's on staff around the clock, seven days a week
- Will be concerned about the functional status of your loved one for the purpose of discharging them to their lowest level of care
- Knows you by name and your loved one's status
- Is in business for the purpose of discharging patients, as well as housing them
- Will help schedule your visits so they are meaningful to you and your loved ones and allow observation of them in programs and activities. In that way, the "Four Rs" process will interface with the socialization that the visit brings.
- Is fully compliant with all State and Federal regulations.

What to Avoid:

The following are indications of poor service and quality:

- Odors are an indication of poor care, lack of cleanliness, poor sanitation, and poor management.
- Unkempt appearance of staff is an indication of a lack of concern for quality, cleanliness and attention to detail.
- Cluttered hallways and patient rooms indicate a lack of concern for organization, safety and visitor impressions.
- Unkempt grounds surrounding the facility indicate a lack of concern for appearance and overall impressions.
- Poor communication with family members and staff who are argumentative when handling complaints are indications of management in denial and incompetence by the nursing home staff.
- Patients who are sitting in wheelchairs, disengaged from activities, are indications of low staff productivity in carrying out the care plan and a low quality of life for the patient.

The following checklist may help you in locating a facility that best meets the needs of your loved one:

**How to score the prospects and choose the right nursing home
(Score: 0 = lowest rating; 10 = highest rating)**

Competitor Ranking	Facility Name	Facility Name	Facility Name	Facility Name
Clean/no odor (look and inspect); Well kept				

grounds				
Professional looking staff				
"Four R's" Services				
Care plan provided upon inquiry (expect quality)				
Physician involved				
Therapists involved				
RN's around the clock				
Met the Administrator/DON				
Will receive discharge plan				
Will receive status report				
Inspection reports good				
Sensitivity to complaints				
Social and recreational activities available				
Religious services available				
Ownership represented onsite				
Total Score				

**Scoring: Projected success of the selection of the nursing home
(Minimum quality = 0; Maximum quality = 130)**

- Excellent quality = 100 to 130
- Good quality = 70 to 99
- Average quality = 40 to 69
- Substandard quality (do not leave your loved one here) = 0 to 39

PART II: AFTER ADMISSION

Be proactive in overseeing the services provided to your loved one:

Do not hesitate to communicate needs and proposed changes to the Administrator. You may be fearful that your loved one will receive a lower quality of service if you are proactive. Be assured that this will not happen, given the oversight that is available to you through the State Department of Public Health.

Find a facility that will provide your loved one's MDS (Minimum Data Set) form:

This form outlines what is wrong with him or her and indicates the care that the staff is proposed to give. Keep this copy and use it for later reference and communication. The State surveyors use this information to hold the nursing home accountable. The nursing home uses the MDS form to bill Medicare and, in some cases, the State's Medicaid programs.

What to Avoid:

The following are indications of poor service and quality:

- Poor documentation of patients' response to care and incidents are indications of a lack of staff supervision and accountability.
- Poor inspection reports are indicators of poor care. These reports must be available to you; if not, the

- facility is hiding something.
- An Administrator and Director of Nursing who are too busy to respond to a direct complaint and appear to be hiding from problems are indications of a lack of focus on priorities and problem solving.
- Poor communication with family members and staff who are argumentative when handling complaints are indications of management in denial and incompetence by the nursing home staff.
- Poor communication with physicians regarding the care plan and progress towards goals and outcomes indicate poor quality control and poor outcomes.
- Poor business practices are evidenced by unexpected bills received from the facility for the cost of extras that Medicare and Medicaid does and does not pay for. Additionally, the misuse of a patient's personal funds indicates a lack of credibility.

Where to go if you do not obtain a resolution on your concerns:

- **State Department of Public Health** – Your state public health department has a hotline for such purposes. The Department is required to investigate every call to the hotline with a site visit. Be prepared, however, to wait on visible results, due to the lack of speed and specificity within a bureaucracy.
- **Facility owner** – Ownership may be local, though, more than likely, the owner is absent and needs to be contacted at the home office. Always talk to the Chief Executive Officer. Put everything in writing, with duplicate copies to the State Chief of Quality Assurance and Surveys.
- **Congressman** – Your congressman has a distinct interest in public oversight for nursing homes. Be prepared for some unwanted negative attitudes on the part of the nursing home staff when you make this move. Typically, the owner will placate the politicians with promises.
- **Find your state elected official:** <http://www.congress.org/congressorg/dbq/officials/?lvl=L>

To the family, placing their loved one in a facility is a life and death matter; to the nursing home, it is a matter of business priorities. Your goal is to make your concerns a priority and change any lack of sensitivity by the service provider. If that is not possible, consider moving your loved one to another facility.

After you have rated the nursing homes against each other using the previous checklist, use this form to score the facility during and after the experience:

**How to rate the facility after making the selection decision
(Score: 0 = lowest rating; 10 = highest rating)**

<i>Satisfaction categories</i>	<i>Upon Admission</i>	<i>Last Week</i>	<i>Upon Discharge</i>
Clean/no odor (look and inspect)/Well kept grounds			
Professional looking staff			
Four "R's" Services			
Care plan provided upon inquiry (expect quality)			
Physician involved			
Therapists involved			
RN's around the clock			
Met the Administrator/DON			
Will receive discharge plan			
Will receive status report			
Inspection reports good			
Sensitivity to complaints			
Social and recreational activities available			
Religious activities available			
Ownership represented onsite			
Total Score			

**Scoring: Projected success of the selection of the nursing home
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What to do if you cannot find the right facility:

Nursing homes are a function of the marketplace, as are all businesses. If you are not finding the right facility, approach the best of the average and offer to do the following:

1. Become a volunteer. Offer to set up a volunteer group to activate the right services.
2. Communicate with other families to create a ground swell for change. You can make a difference. The facility may appreciate having help in upgrading its existing image, especially since most nursing homes are struggling, due to intense competition and social pressures to perform better.
3. Define the problems that nursing homes face in serving their market. Offer to form a focus group whose function is to advise management of the market's wishes and offer this through the hierarchy of the home's ownership.

Be aware that today's nursing homes are struggling with staffing and financial issues, and you cannot predict how those issues may impact your decision. The best you can do is work with the facility to avoid some of the pitfalls we have pointed out in this document. We do not pretend to know where you will find the right fit. However, we do know that the right facility will work with you in a positive manner to be the best it can be for your loved one.

We advise that you share this information with ...

- Facility management
- Friends and family members
- Other families at the facility
- State Department of Public Health
- Your local newspaper

Be sure to keep this information for future reference.

For further information:

Call 1 (800) 789-4836,
and ask for a Dorothea C. White Foundation Representative
or Email us at:

info@dcwhitefoundation.org

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