

HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT NURSING HOME FOR YOUR LOVED ONE

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Choosing a nursing home for a family member is one of the most difficult decisions in life. Many of us do not want to think about our loved ones being in a nursing home. However, due to declining medical condition or an unexpected event a nursing home may be the only option. Choosing the right nursing home is a very stressful and time-consuming task. Fortunately, there are resources available to help you with this decision and some tips you can use when selecting the right nursing home for your loved one.

Choosing a nursing home is a very important decision. You need to think about whether a nursing home is the best choice for you. A nursing home provides care to people who cannot be cared for at home or in the community. For people who can't take care of themselves due to physical, emotional, or mental problems, nursing homes can provide a wide range of personal care and health services.

Care in a nursing home can be very expensive. Nursing homes usually provide 24-hour medical care as well as room, meals, activities, and some personal care. Most nursing homes charge a basic fee for room, meals, and some personal care. You may have to pay extra for other services or care for special medical needs. It is important to get a list of fees in advance and discuss these costs and how you will pay for them.

A nursing home may not be your only choice for your personal care and health services. Depending on your needs and resources, there are other kinds of living and care choices available for long-term care. You can get long-term care at home, in senior centers, at community centers, or in special retirement or assisted living facilities. You may need help from family and friends, community services, and professional care agencies. You may wish to talk to your family, doctor, or a social worker to help decide what long-term care you need.

It is important to select a nursing home that is close and convenient to the person(s) who will be visiting the resident most often. Residents who have frequent visitors often recover faster, are happier and healthier from the love and attention received and tend to receive a higher quality of care. When family members and friends are close enough to visit frequently, they can monitor the resident's condition, participate in care planning and respond quickly to emergencies.

You should research the local nursing homes in your area through both online resources and personal visits to each facility you are considering. Medicare's website is an excellent resource for finding information on local nursing home. Go to www.medicare.gov/nhcompare. All nursing homes have to report to Medicare and each State has a department which compiles data for each nursing home through surveys and complaint investigations.

Another great internet resource is www.memberofthefamily.net. MemberoftheFamily.net provides information about 16,000 Medicare/Medicaid-certified nursing homes in the United States, including easy-to-understand reports based on recent government surveys. They also compile a National Watch List of homes recently cited for violations or that have had substantiated complaints made against them. Additionally they maintain an Honor Roll of facilities found to be deficiency-free.

Contact the local Long-Term Care Ombudsman's Office, which is a program that advocates for the rights of all nursing home residents, including investigating all nursing home complaints. Information on Kentucky's Long-Term Care Ombudsman's program can be found at chfs.ky.gov/dail/kltcop.htm and information on Ohio's Long-Term Care Ombudsman's program can be found at www.aging.ohio.gov/services/ombudsman.

Ask people you trust, like your doctor, family, friends, neighbors, or clergy if they have had personal experience with nursing homes. They may be able to give you the name of a nursing home where they had a good experience.

Nothing substitutes for a personal visit to the facility. Once you have identified a nursing home that seems to be affordable, to have the services necessary and to have a vacancy, visit the facility. Ask to see the entire facility, not just the nicely decorated lobby or a designated unit. Try to get a feel for the quality of care and how residents are treated by the staff. Resident appearance, use of restraints, residents' rooms, quality of food and activities are important factors in evaluating a nursing home. However, nothing is more important than the quality and quantity of nursing home staff. It is recommended to make a scheduled visit and then return on a different day and a different time of the day to see if the staffing appears to be the same as when you first visited.

How do you feel when you visit the facility? How does it compare to others? How did the administrator and staff treat you? Remember that you'll be depending on these people to take care of your loved one. If you don't like visiting there, imagine what it would be like living there.

What services does the nursing home provide? What fees do they charge for a basic room, meals, personal care, special medical needs, etc.? Ask to see a copy of their most recent survey, which they are required by law to make available.

Although choosing the right nursing home can be stressful, there are resources available to help you along with this process. Remember, the most important thing is to take the time to fully research each and every facility you are considering. For more "How To" information, including a Nursing Home Checklist, go to www.medicare.gov/publications/pubs/pdf/02174.pdf.