alzheimer's % association

Choosing a Nursing Home: What to Look For, What to Ask.

When considering moving Mom into a nursing home, you should determine Mom's specific needs and your specific family situation as well as what aspects of care are most important to you.

Understand that no one can take care of Mom as well as you. Your continued involvement in her care will help the nursing home you choose provide the best care possible. Only consider facilities in which you feel comfortable and the staff is friendly and welcoming. You may need to trust your first instinct about a facility, and if necessary, visit a facility again before you make your decision.

Caring for a person with Alzheimer's or a related dementia is a mentally and physically draining effort. Each family arrives at a decision to place a loved one in a long term care facility based on their particular circumstances. There is no right time to do this. It is a decision based on the necessity for a certain level of care, safety that is unavailable to the person at home, the declining health of the caregiver, or a combination of these reasons.

We have developed this checklist of things to look for and questions to ask to assist you in making a decision that will best suit your family's needs. When using this tool, we suggest that you visit several facilities that are convenient to you and complete the checklist for each facility you visit. Then compare the answers on each checklist, paying special attention to the areas that are of most importance to you and your Mom.

You may also visit the West Virginia Healthcare Association website (www.wvhca.org) for information on selecting a long term care facility.

The Building and Environment

THINGS TO NOTICE

Before visiting the nursing home, consider its location and distance to the hospital or your Mom's personal physician. Will this be a convenient location for family and friends to easily visit?

Before entering the nursing home, notice if the building and grounds are well cared for, clean and attractive. Once inside, be aware of various environmental factors, such as the noise level and whether or not you hear overhead paging, if the halls and common areas are spacious and well lit, if the facility appears to be clean and well-kept, if the building is free of overwhelming unpleasant odors, if there are quiet areas where residents can visit with friends and family. See if there is a receptionist desk upon entering where someone can assist you.

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- ? How many beds do you have?
- ? What are visiting hours?
- ? Are visits with Mom welcome at any time?
- ? Are your exterior doors locked?
- What security measures are in place to keep Mom from wandering out of the building? (Exclusive of Alzheimer's or specialized units which may be locked)
- ? Are pets allowed either as tenants or as visitors? Under what circumstances and what type of pets?
- Po you ever take Mom outside? Or may visitors and family members take Mom outside?
- ? Is there a secure area for Dad to go outside on his own?

Services

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

? Can I review your latest state survey and/or monitoring report? (This is the report from the state licensing agency. It should be kept in a public place for anyone to see.)

- ? Under what circumstances would you ask us to move or transfer Mom? How long would we have to make other arrangements? Do you help make those arrangements?
- ? What types of behavioral issues are you able to handle?
- ? Do you keep documentation of all the behavior interventions you use? (Interventions are those things the staff should try in order to change or handle Mom's behavior BEFORE they suggest medication as a solution.)
- ? What types of behaviors would cause you to ask us to move Mom?
- ? Are you able to accommodate residents who wander inside or outside the building?
- ? Do you have an Alzheimer's program? If so, is it designated as a Special Care Unit, which means the facility is specifically licensed by the state as a special unit?
- ? Are there written materials that explain the types of care provided at the facility and the associated costs?
- ? Is there an active resident and family council that Mom and I can participate in?
- ? Do you offer transportation services to doctor's offices, dental appointments, etc.?
- ? What services are available without leaving the building, such as dental care, vision care, podiatry services, hearing services, hair/beauty salon? Who pays for these services?
- ? Are rehabilitation services available, such as occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy or recreational therapy?
- ? Do you replace items that are lost?
- ? Do you have a smoking policy?
- ? Who will do Mom's laundry? Do we have the option of doing it ourselves?

Resident Rooms

THINGS TO NOTICE

When entering a resident room, is it attractive, cheerful and well lit? Are there windows? Each resident should have access to a call bell, but look to see if it is in an appropriate place such as near the bed and/or in the bathroom. Do you see water pitchers in the room and can they be reached by the resident? Look at the amount of

storage space available to each resident. Observe to see if the rooms are large enough to accommodate wheelchairs?

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- ? How is Dad's room or unit selected? Can we pick the room?
- ? Are we able to decorate and/or bring in Mom's own furniture?
- ? Will Dad have a telephone or cable in his room? If so, who pays for them? If not, do we have access to those items?
- ? Do you currently have any rooms/beds available?
- ? What are your policies regarding roommates?
- ? Are all rooms semi private and private, or do you have three and four beds in a room?

Resident Appearance

THINGS TO NOTICE

As you walk through the nursing home, you will see residents in and out of their rooms. Notice if they are clean, well groomed, and appropriately dressed for the season or time of day. Are residents sitting alone in the hallways or are they engaged in an activity? Are staff members conversing with the residents as they pass by?

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- ? How often will Dad get a shower?
- ? Can Mom take a bath rather than a shower if she prefers?
- ? How often are Dad's teeth brushed or his dentures cleaned?
- ? Is there barber or hair stylist service available? How often may we schedule that service? How much does it cost?
- ? Can Mom dress in the clothing of her choice and what she is accustomed to wearing? Or does she need to dress in sweat pants?
- ? How often is Dad going to be shaved? Will you also shave my Mom's chin whiskers?

Dining and Meal Service

THINGS TO NOTICE

When entering the dining room, the tables should be attractively set and the atmosphere should be pleasing. If you are visiting during a meal, does the food that is being served look and smell appetizing? If not, ask if a menu is posted or is available for you to see. Are residents who need help with eating being assisted? Are staff members conversing with those residents while assisting them?

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- ? Can Mom choose where and with whom she wants to eat her meals?
- ? Do the residents participate in meal planning? Can Dad choose what he eats?
- ? Can I eat a meal with Dad?
- ? What times are meals served?
- ? Are there options to choose from at mealtime?
- ? What about food in rooms? What is your policy?
- ? What kinds of snacks are available?
- ? Can I bring Mom her favorite snack?
- ? Does a dietitian plan menus for Mom since she is a diabetic and needs a special diet?

Activities

THINGS TO NOTICE

Activities are an important part of the daily life for your Mom or Dad. As you are touring the building, notice if the residents appear to be doing something. Visit the activities room, and look for a current schedule, which should be posted. If it isn't, ask for one. Do you see any activities that you know your Mom would enjoy? Do the activities look diverse and interesting?

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- ? Do you have a recreational therapist on staff?
- ? Do you provide special activities for people with dementia?

- ? How many activity staff do you have?
- ? Does the activity calendar reflect the interests of the residents? How do you find out what the interests of the residents are?
- ? Is Mom able to participate in activities of her choice?
- ? Do you provide weekend and evening activities?
- ? Do you coordinate and provide transportation for community outings?
- ? Do you provide activities for people that can't or don't want to leave their rooms?
- ? Do you have life enrichment programs?

Costs

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- ? What does it cost per day here? Per month?
- ? How often is the rate increased?
- ? What type of federal, state and private funding options do you accept, such as Medicare, Medicaid, private insurance, etc? Do you accept VA benefits?
- ? Are all the services Dad requires covered in the basic daily charge? If not, is a list of specific services covered in the basic rate available?

Staff

THINGS TO NOTICE

The staff members who work in the nursing home are the individuals who will be providing care for your Dad. Pay particular attention to how they interact with residents, and how quickly they respond to requests. Staff members should know residents by name, interact respectfully and in a friendly manner with other staff, and should always knock on the door before entering a resident's room.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- ? Do you have a full time social worker on staff?
- ? What types of staffing patterns do you use? (These will vary depending upon the setting, but ask what the numbers of staff are for each shift: day shift, evening shift and night shift.)

- ? How often does the doctor come to the nursing home?
- ? Can the doctor be reached at all times?
- ? What types of training does the staff receive? Who trains them? How often do they receive updated training?
- ? Has the Alzheimer's Association provided dementia training for the staff? When was the Alzheimer's Association training last provided?

Family Responsibilities

This transition can be very difficult and the support of the family on the day of admission or move is critical. A family member should plan to spend a few hours with Mom on the first day to help get her settled. Understand that Mom may be grumpy, may try to get you to stay longer, and/or may act hurt or angry. Remember that you have given this decision much thought and that you are doing what you believe is best for your Mom and your family.

Visit regularly and encourage other family and friends to do the same.

Bring any concerns, complaints or suggestions to the administrator or manager immediately.

Get involved in the facility or the community. There are many ways to do so through volunteering or through various councils.