

alzheimer's  association™

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Research • Support & Care • Reduce the Risk



Selecting a Dementia Care Unit in a Skilled Nursing Home

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SELECTING A DEDICATED DEMENTIA CARE UNIT IN A SKILLED NURSING FACILITY

The primary goal of a dedicated dementia care unit is to help the individual achieve the best possible quality of life.

Care should be individually centered and offer residents safety, security, medical care, emotional support, reasonable privacy, access to appropriate activities and assistance with the activities of daily life.

The State of Nebraska has passed the Disclosure Act. This act requires nursing facilities to furnish families with information on their special care unit that tells the families why this unit is “special.”

The State of Iowa has state regulations that facilities must meet if they want a license as a Chronic Confusion or Dementing Illness Unit.

Even with this legislation, families need to rely on their own judgment when making the final selection.

Included in this brochure are questions that families may wish to ask as they evaluate facilities.

This brochure is simply a checklist with some standardized questions that can be asked as the family tours the different facilities. If a nursing facility is selected hastily or without thorough research, it may prove unsatisfactory, and a move to a more suitable facility may become necessary.

If more information is needed regarding the selection of dedicated or “special” dementia units, please contact the Alzheimer’s Association®, Midlands Chapter.

Consider being an Advocate—Join the Chapter’s Public Policy Committee.

The Midlands Chapter is a not-for-profit organization of volunteers, laypersons and medical professionals all working together to accomplish these goals. Essential information is made available through advocacy, education and information, family support services and research updates. Founded in 1982, the Chapter is a member of the National Alzheimer's Association® located in Chicago, Illinois. The Chapter assists families/caregivers in Eastern and Northeast Nebraska and Southwest Iowa.

The primary goals of the Midlands Alzheimer's Association® are:

- Educating and Information
- Family Support Services
- Advocacy
- Support of research

TIPS FOR FAMILIES

Selecting a nursing facility for your loved one is a difficult procedure. Below, are several tips you might want to consider before the final decision is made.

- Make an appointment for a formal tour of the facility with the unit director.
- Return to the facility at a different time of day and make an informal tour.
- Consider the location of the facility in relationship to that of the family.
- Talk to families with residents currently in the unit.
- Check to see if your private physician will make calls to the facility you select.
- All pharmacy costs are billed directly to the family and are not included in the monthly facility charges.
- Telephone numbers to know: 1-800-942-7830, Nebraska Long-Term Care Ombudsman; 1-515-281-4656, Iowa Department of Elder Affairs Long-Term Care Ombudsman; 402-595-3356, Nebraska Department of Social Services; 712-328-4875, Iowa Department of Human Services.

PHILOSOPHY AND CRITERIA FOR ADMISSION TO THE UNIT

One of the first things for a family to decide is if a dedicated special care dementia unit would be right for their loved one. A unit is only "special" if it offers a service that is "special" and needed by their family member. Pre-admission assessments should include the family's input regarding the individual's ability level. Management of difficult behaviors without the use of restraints should be possible. Matters like cost, unit security and medical services available may not seem important now, but they will have long range importance to the family.

- How does unit care differ from care in the regular facility? *(Request written materials from the facility relative to philosophy of care, services provided for dementia individuals and cost per day. Ask what this charge includes and if there additional costs.)*
- Does the unit accept Medicaid?
- What is the unit's policy regarding medical and physical restraints? *(Federal law requires that the facility use the least amount of medical and physical restraints possible to insure the resident's quality of life.)*
- How often does the staff monitor the necessary restraints?
- What type of security system is used in the unit?
- Are there special policies written for unit residents?
- Are medical specialists available to serve residents in the unit? *(Dentist, Podiatrist, Ophthalmologist, Audiologist, for example)*
- Are skilled rehabilitation services available for unit residents? *(Physical, Occupational speech, Recreation, for example)*

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- Can residents' private physicians be retained in the facility? *(Federal law requires that a resident be seen by a physician every 30 days for the first three months. After this period of time, they must be seen by a physician every 60 days.)*
- Does the facility do a pre-admission assessment personally or by telephone?

FAMILY RELATED AREA

Residents in a unit need a familiar, secure environment. The value of having personal and treasured items in their rooms is important. The possibility of theft and breakage is present, but the value of having these items far outweighs the disadvantages. Maintenance of family relationships with the resident and staff should be an important goal of the unit and facility.

- Is the resident allowed personal items to furnish his/her room?
- What is the policy on home visits outside the unit?
- Is there a policy on family visits within the unit?
- Is there a quiet, private area for residents to entertain visitors?

SERVICES OF THE FACILITY

Staffing on units varies greatly. There should be enough staff on day and evening shifts so that residents can be assisted to do tasks for themselves rather than have the tasks done for them. Ongoing dementia training is essential to the staff and residents. Activities are vital for a good unit.

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These activities should support remaining abilities, minimize failure, enhance dignity and enable pleasure. A beautiful environment does not necessarily insure quality care for the resident.

- Is the environment clean (odor free), comfortable, and well lit?
- How many staff people are scheduled on each shift?
- How is the staff selected and trained for the unit?
- Is there an ongoing training program for staff working on the unit?
- Do the residents seem to interact well with the staff?
- Does the staff appear to display respect to the residents?
- What is the availability of the beauty salon and barbershop for residents?
- How often are snacks made available with finger foods offered for self-feeding?
- Are activity programs personalized to meet the needs of individual residents?
- Who plans and carries out the activity programs and what are some examples of personalized activities?
- What pharmacy does the nursing facility use?
- Are unit residents included in social outings?
- Is there a courtyard connected to the unit for the residents and how is it monitored?
- Are the residents allowed to go out of the unit to take part in the facility's activities?
- Is smoking allowed and is it supervised?