

Working with staff in a nursing home or assisted living facility

The needs of the person living with Alzheimer's will change as the disease progresses. You can help care staff meet a resident's changing needs by remaining actively involved in the care plan. Your involvement begins even before the person is admitted to a long-term care facility.

Intake and admissions

Prior to residency in an assisted living facility or nursing home, an intake meeting is held so that the care team can begin to learn about the person's history, cultural beliefs, needs, likes and dislikes. It's important to share as much information as possible in this meeting to ensure the team is prepared to provide the best care.

Assessment

An initial assessment is conducted before admission and then repeated at admission and regularly afterward. As a caregiver or family member, you should be present to share information and help note any changes in the person's health.

In the assessment, the staff tries to understand as much as possible about the resident, in regard to:

- Cognitive health.
- Physical health.
- Physical functioning.
- Behavior.
- Sensory abilities, such as vision and hearing.
- Communication abilities.
- Decision-making skills.
- Personal background.
- Spiritual needs.
- Cultural and personal preferences.

Care or service planning

Nursing homes and assisted living facilities make detailed plans for the care of each resident. In a nursing home, this is called a care plan. In an assisted living facility, the document is known as a service plan.

The care plan or service plan is drawn up at a care conference, which is attended by professional staff members as well as the resident and family members.

Care conferences are held routinely, every few months. They may also be called on an as-needed basis. The agenda includes discussing a resident's health, medications and activities. The care conference is a good place to meet staff members, ask questions and raise concerns.

Participate in the care plan

People with dementia and their family members have a right to be included in care conferences and should try to be present. If necessary, ask to be included via a conference call.

Before the meeting:

- Ask that the meeting be held when you can attend.
- Request a copy of the current care plan so you can review it before the meeting.
- List the questions, changes, concerns or goals you'd like to discuss.

At the meeting:

- Involve the resident as much as possible.
- Ask questions to make sure you understand everything.
- Take notes.
- Be sure you agree with the care plan.
- Ask for a copy of the care plan.

Follow up:

- Stay involved in care. As the disease progresses, the person's needs will change.
- Log any reactions to the care plan, medication or treatment.
- Communicate regularly with the doctor or staff about the care plan.
- If the plan isn't working, ask for another care conference.

Resident council

A resident council is a group of residents who discuss concerns and arrange for activities. In nursing homes, staff members usually help lead resident councils. Assisted living facilities may offer other ways for residents to meet and discuss care. Inquire to see if there is an opportunity like this in the facility you are using.

Family council

A family council is a group of family members and/or friends of residents who meet to discuss the nursing home. Staff members may or may not be involved. An assisted living facility may have a family council or offer other means for families to discuss the facility's care. Ask to see if your facility has a family council; it can be another way to stay involved with care.

Informal interaction

When you visit the person with the disease, greet staff members and chat with them. These unplanned meetings help build trust and cooperation.

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