

## Selecting a Nursing Home II: When You Tour a Nursing Home

Visiting any nursing home that you might consider as a future home is one of the best ways to determine if the facility is suitable for you. Call the nursing homes you are interested in and make an appointment to meet with the admissions staff.

Each nursing home has its own policies and procedures, but all must follow certain state and federal regulations and respect residents' rights. A copy of the home's policies should be available upon request.

Following is a list of some policies to check:

- the use of personal belongings and furniture
- the availability of ethnic foods or special diet preferences
- room assignments and changes
- reserving a bed if transferred to a hospital
- visiting hours (should cover a 10-hour period and two meal times)
- emergency procedures
- self-care
- phone calls
- leaving the facility for short visits with family or friends
- procedures for handling theft
- complaint procedures
- access to personal funds

When you visit a nursing home, look for its license. It will be prominently displayed, usually in the lobby. It is also very important to see firsthand what the environment of the home is like. This will also give you an opportunity to ask questions on the care and services that the nursing home provides and to clarify any issues with regard to placing an individual in the nursing home. During the visit be observant of the interaction between caregivers and residents and pay close attention to the following:

### **Physical Appearance: Take a good look around at everything**

- Do residents have personal belongings decorating their rooms?
- Does each resident have at least one comfortable chair?
- Does each resident have his/her own dresser and closet space with a locked drawer or other secured compartment?
- Is there an out-of-doors area where residents can walk or sit and is it used?
- Does the equipment – wheelchairs, therapy devices – appear in good condition?
- Is there a lounge or other area where residents can entertain visitors privately?

### **Safety**

State standards require that a home provide a safe environment for residents whether they are mobile or in wheelchairs, whether they are confused or have poor eyesight.

*Look for:*

- handrails in hallways and other critical places
- wide, clear walking areas
- the absence of hazards that might cause accidents
- good lighting

telephones and large print notices placed so that wheelchair-bound residents can make use of them

appropriate inside temperature and whether or not residents are dressed appropriately

clearly marked exits and well-lighted elevators

**Find out if the local fire department participates in fire drills and how often drills are held in the nursing home.**

### **Cleanliness**

A good home should be clean. Look in the corners of residents' rooms, bathrooms, kitchens, nurses' stations, etc., as well as in the main visiting lounges. Look for cleanliness **EVERYWHERE**.

Unpleasant odors reflect problems. If there is an odor in a particular section of the home, go back to see if it has been eliminated within a reasonable amount of time. This will give you an idea of how long it takes the home to deal with the cause of the unpleasant odor.

### **Room Assignments**

Do residents socialize with each other?

Is there activity in the corridors?

Are residents engaged in doing things or just sitting in a lounge or in the hallways?

Are residents neatly dressed and do they appear to be wearing their own clothing?

Are residents out of bed?

Do staff interact with residents in a warm and friendly manner?

Do staff address the residents by name?

Do staff respond to someone calling for help?

Are people assisted in walking for the purpose of exercising or retraining?

**Ask several residents how they keep occupied, and what they particularly like doing at the facility.**

Do residents share rooms? How many people to a room?

Does the facility select compatible roommates?

Are rooms assigned based on severity of illness?

How does the facility deal with problems between roommates?

### **Food**

Mealtime is an important part of the residents' day. Try to visit during mealtime and observe the way food is served and how the staff and residents interact.

Is food appetizing and of good quality?

Do residents have an alternative to the main menu?

Are residents encouraged and assisted with eating (if necessary) while the food is served?

Is this a time when socializing is encouraged?

Is the dining room clean, attractive and colorful?

Many facilities try to be less "institutional" and use tablecloths, china and silver, enhancing mealtime.

## **Medical/Nursing Care**

It is hard to observe medical/nursing practices, but you can ask questions:

- Does the same nurse or aide care for the resident during each shift?
- Will your family doctor be able to care for you in the facility?
- If you do not have a private doctor, who will the physician be and what relationship will you or a family member have with this doctor?
- How often will visits be made, and how will medical emergencies be handled?
- Ask when and how often the facility performs assessments on the resident and how/when you will be notified to attend the care planning meetings.

## **Special Therapies**

If you might need speech, physical or special therapy, look at the therapy rooms. If possible, speak to the staff person in charge.

- How frequently will therapy be offered?
- Can therapies be provided on an optional basis or a for-private-pay basis?
- Is the physician involved in assessing the therapy and your response to it?

## **Dementia Units/Alzheimer Units**

- What additional services does your Dementia Unit offer?
- What additional training does the staff of your Dementia Unit receive?
- Does your facility float staff from other units to work on your Dementia Unit at times when staffing may be short?
- What special activities does your facility offer the residents on the Dementia Unit?
- Is there a time or situation my loved one would be required to leave the Dementia Unit?
- Does your Dementia Unit have specific precautions or safety features to protect my loved one from wandering out of the facility?
- Are there other types of safety features your facility offers on your Dementia Unit that you would like to show me?
- Does your facility offer assistance or education on Dementia for the family members?
- What are your policies on toileting/incontinence care?

## **Activities Program**

All homes are required to offer activities for residents. As you visit homes, you may find a great difference in the way activities are offered. Ideally, a program should be designed to fit the interests and skills of each person and be available on a daily basis at various times of the day including weekends.

- Ask if residents are taken out for events in the community. How often? Where do they go?
- Do people in wheelchairs get to participate?
- How often are outside events brought in for the entertainment of residents?
- What activities are provided for bed-bound residents?

## **Staffing**

- How many staff work on the unit my loved one will live in, on each shift?
- How do you ensure that staff really know the resident they are assigned to?
- Is each resident cared for by the same staff?

## **Pastoral Care**

- What religious denominations are served at the facility?
- What services are offered at the facility? How frequently are these offered?

## **Personal Property**

- What system is in place for inventory of resident's personal property?
- How does the facility investigate missing items?
- How is personal property safeguarded?
- Upon discharge, how is personal property handled, and returned to the family?

*This guide was adapted from "Selecting a Nursing Home in New York State".  
For more information on nursing homes, finding and comparing nursing homes, state  
survey results and regulations visit: <http://www.health.state.ny.us/>*