

CAREGIVER Tips & Tools

California Central Coast Chapter

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A monthly newsletter
for people caring for
those affected by
Alzheimer's disease
or another form of
dementia.



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Knowing When to Make the Move & How to Choose the Appropriate Setting

By Gabriella Garcia, PsyD

Early in my journey as a caregiver, the very thought of placing my loved in a care setting outside of our home was enough to make my stomach turn. All of the "what-ifs" would rush through my mind in addition to feelings of guilt.

The game changer for me was a terrible fall that my loved one had. I realized then that keeping my loved one safe was my top priority. As hard as it was, we made the move shortly after the fall.

Choosing a residential care setting may seem like an overwhelming task, but asking the right questions and knowing what to look for can make it more manageable.

Because residential care is available in a variety of settings, it's important to understand the needs of your loved one with dementia so you can choose the best care.

Types of Care Settings

Assisted Living bridges the gap between living independently and living in a nursing home. It typically offers a combination of housing, meals, supportive services and health care. Not all assisted living facilities offer services specifically designed for people with dementia, so it is important to understand the level of service they are able to offer your loved one.

Skilled Nursing Facilities (SNFs; AKA Long-Term Care or custodial care) provide around-the-clock care and long-term medical treatment. Most SNFs have services and staff to address issues such as nutrition, care planning, recreation, spirituality and medical care. SNFs have different staff-to-resident ratios and their staff members have various levels of experience and training.

Alzheimer's Special Care Units (SCUs; AKA Memory Care Units) are designed to meet the specific needs of individuals with Alzheimer's and other dementias. SCUs can take many forms and exist within various types of residential care, including assisted living facilities, and they may or may not be locked or secured units. These



units most often are cluster settings in which persons living with dementia are grouped on a unit within a larger residential care building. Because services can vary, it is important to ask specific questions about what type of care is provided in an SCU to ensure that the level of care is appropriate for your loved one.

Continuing Care Retirement Communities (CCRCs) provide different levels of care (independent, assisted living and skilled nursing) based on individual needs. A resident is able to move throughout the different levels of care within the community if needs change.

Plan to visit several care communities before making a final decision. Make an appointment for a tour on your first visit, but also make one or two unannounced visits. Look around and talk with the staff, as well as residents and their families. Ask questions and make observations. Visit the communities at different times of the day, including meal times.

When you visit a care community, ask to see the latest survey/inspection report, which they are required to provide. The report and the disclosure form can give you a picture of the facility's services. If it is a SNF, you can go to Medicare's Nursing Home Compare website to learn how it compares to the national average (medicare.gov/NursingHomeCompare).

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Ask the care community about room availability, cost and participation in Medicare or Medicaid. Consider placing your name on a waiting list even if you are not ready to make a decision. If payment will be out of pocket (or private pay), ask what happens if the person living with dementia runs out of funds. Some communities will accept Medicaid, others may not. If you anticipate the need for Medicaid either now or in the future, plan to

visit with a lawyer that specializes in elder care prior to moving into a facility to ensure a good financial plan is in place.

This may seem extremely overwhelming, but being prepared is the key to a smooth transition if and when that time comes. And remember, the Alzheimer's Association is here to support you throughout your journey.



TIPS & TOOLS



Helpful Questions

When choosing a care community, there are a number of factors to consider, including the staff, the environment, the programs and the type of treatment provided. Routine is extremely important for persons with dementia, as is focusing on their current abilities. As your loved one's advocate, consider asking the following when touring facilities:

- ◊ Are families encouraged to participate in care planning?
- ◊ How are families informed of changes in resident's condition and care needs?
- ◊ Are staff trained in dementia care?
- ◊ How often are physicians and nurses or nurse practitioners on premises?
- ◊ Is care personalized to meet specific needs, abilities and interests?
- ◊ How does staff handle challenging behaviors?
- ◊ What is the ratio of residents to staff?
- ◊ Do planned activities take place? (Ask to see an activity schedule; note if the activity listed at the time of your visit is occurring.)
- ◊ Are activities designed to meet specific needs, interests and abilities?
- ◊ Which therapies (e.g., physical, occupational, speech, recreational) are offered?
- ◊ Is transportation available for medical appointments and shopping?
- ◊ Is there a designated family visiting area or a private place to have visitors?
- ◊ Are resident rooms clean and spacious?
- ◊ Are residents allowed to bring familiar items (e.g., photos, bedding, a chair)?
- ◊ Is there flexibility in meal times based on the individual's schedule?
- ◊ Does staff have a plan for monitoring adequate nutrition?
- ◊ Is staff able to accommodate special dietary needs?
- ◊ Do staff provide appropriate assistance based on person's abilities (e.g., encouragement during meals or assisted feeding if needed)?
- ◊ Are family and friends allowed to participate in care?
- ◊ Do the visiting hours work for the family?
- ◊ Has the discharge policy been discussed? (Learn about any situation or condition that would lead to a discharge from the facility, such as change in behavior or financial circumstances.)
- ◊ Is there an "aging in place" policy where residents can remain in the community throughout the course of the disease?
- ◊ Does the community provide an escort to the emergency room if a visit is required due to illness or an accident?
- ◊ Does the community provide end-of-life care? Is hospice care available if needed?



GETTING STARTED

Join us and our community partners for a three-part series that teaches the basics of the disease, how to face difficult conversations and the importance of putting legal and financial plans in place.

- April 5 / 10 - 11am**
Understanding Alzheimer's and Dementia with California Caregiver Resource Centers
- April 12 / 10 - 11am**
Managing Money with HICAP Medicare Counseling and Advocacy Program
- April 19 / 10 - 11am**
Dementia Conversations: Driving, Doctors and Making Plans with the CA DMV

**REGISTER AT ALZ.ORG/CRF
OR CALL 800.272.3900**

