

Working with Staff in a Nursing Home or Assisted Living Facility

As Alzheimer's disease progresses, the person's needs change. You can help care staff meet a resident's changing needs by staying involved. In fact, your involvement can start even before a person is admitted to a long-term care facility.

Intake and admissions

An intake meeting happens before a person moves into assisted living or a nursing home. At this intake meeting, the treatment team can begin to learn about someone's personal history, cultural beliefs, needs, likes and dislikes.

Assessment

An assessment happens before admission. Assessment is repeated at admission and regularly afterwards. An assessment takes the large view of a resident. The staff tries to understand as much as they can about the person, including:

- cognitive health
- physical health
- physical functioning
- behavior
- sensory abilities, such as vision and hearing
- communication abilities
- decision making
- personal background
- spiritual needs
- cultural and personal preferences

To monitor the quality of life in nursing homes, staff also use an official assessment form. This form, the Minimum Data Set (MDS), is filled out for each resident at least four times a year. The information goes to state survey agencies and to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).

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. People at this meeting include professional staff members as well as residents 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. If necessary, ask to be included via a conference call.

Before the meeting

- Ask that the meeting be held when you can come
- Request a copy of the current care plan
- List the questions, changes, concerns or goals you'd like discussed

At the meeting

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

Follow up

- Stay involved in care.
- Log any reactions to the care plan, medication or treatment.
- Communicate 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 their care

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 in family councils. An assisted living facility may have a family council or offer other means for families to discuss the facility's care.

Informal interaction

When you visit your loved one, greet staff members and chat with them. These unplanned meetings help build trust and cooperation with problem solving.

The Alzheimer's Association is the leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer care, support and research.

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