

Looking for a Nursing Home

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Sooner or later many families consider nursing home placement. Nursing home care is the next logical step after home care or assisted living. Contrary to common belief, nursing homes are not places where families abandon their loved one. Nor do all facilities provide substandard care. But the family must choose carefully and remain very involved in their loved one's care. The following are some recommendations when considering nursing home placement.

1. Check the internet for the Nursing Home Compare site

(<http://www.hcfa.gov/medicaid/nhcomp.htm>)

This website will share the latest surveys of facilities in your area. If you find citations for the facilities, you know you have to look carefully.

2. You will want to visit the nursing homes first (if that is possible) before making your decision. It is possible that the numbers on Nursing Home Compare website, for example, are driven by one or two (perhaps quite explainable) instances.

3. If you do visit some of the things you will want to pay attention as you walk through the facility:

- Is staff attentive to residents' needs and respectful in their interaction?
- Do staff seem very hurried and stressed? Do they say hello to you as you walk about?
- Has the administrator been in their position for a while and does the administrator share the facility's philosophy of care with you?
- Does the facility have a resident's or family council? If so ask to see the minutes of the last meeting to see what issues were brought up by residents.
- Ask the administrator, point blank, to explain the deficiency you saw and listen to the story. Has it been corrected? How is the administrator making sure it won't happen again?
- Ask to see the Statement of Deficiencies and Plan of Correction. This is the federal survey that is usually posted in plain site near the main entrance. The information is what is probably driving the information you are seeing on the web.
- Does the facility smell of urine? Is it clean? Are the hallways cluttered with unnecessary equipment?
- Are the residents out of bed and dressed? Are they engaged and active (note – TV is not an activity)
- Ask about daily activities and how many residents attend the activities.

- Listen for call lights to see if they are answered as you walk about.
- If you see something or a resident you have a question about (e.g., why do they not have their shoes on) ask the administrator or whoever is walking you around your question and listen closely to the answer. Does the answer satisfy you?
- If you want can you bring in personal items and even furniture to make your mother feel it is her home?
- Does the place seem overly noisy?
- Are the staff engaged with the residents? Do they speak to the residents or simply walk by them? Are they respectful?
- Is there a large noisy dining room? (this is a bad sign) Does the food look appetizing?
- Do the staff acknowledge you? Make eye contact? Seem friendly?
- Do you feel comfortable with the administrator? The director of nursing? Do you feel you could bring these people complaints?

These are just a few questions or observations you could make. CMS's Nursing Home Compare also has a list of questions. What state are you in? Some states have a nursing home web site that is similar to CMS' Nursing Home Compare. The state site might have additional information the federal site does not have.

All nursing homes are not bad. Neither are they all good. Many homes change in quality almost monthly with high staff turnover. Sometimes, unfortunately, the numbers (without an explanation) will not capture the full picture of the kind of nursing home it is. You have to see it and listen to the administrator's and staff's stories.