



# *Choosing A Nursing Home*

Selecting a nursing home is one of the most important and difficult decisions that you may be asked to make either for yourself or for a family member. This booklet is designed as a first step in helping you choose a nursing home. It provides information about types of care, visiting facilities and interviewing residents and staff, paying for nursing home care, and reviewing and signing a contract.

## Where to Start Are there Options?

Until recently, few alternatives to nursing home care were available to those that could no longer take care of themselves independently. People who cannot live at home without some assistance now have a variety of services and living arrangements that offer different levels of care.

Please consider one of the following options as a preferred living situation for yourself or your loved one.

### **Home and Community Care**

A variety of home services may be able to assist the person who is ill or disabled, and will allow them to continue living in their present residence. Home services include Meals on Wheels programs, Community of Caring (friendly visiting and respite care), shopping services, transportation, and adult day care. There are also a number of services that help care for people in their homes. If you are considering home care, thoroughly discuss the possible arrangements with family members or friends to learn if they are able to assist in providing or arranging care. Some nursing home facilities may also provide "respite services", taking care of a loved one for short periods to allow caregivers a break.

### **Subsidized Senior Housing**

Federal and State programs subsidize housing for older people with a low-to-moderate income. These facilities may offer assistance to residents with tasks such as shopping. Residents generally live independently in their own apartment within a senior housing complex.

### **Assisted Living**

If you or your loved one require some assistance with small tasks such as cooking or laundry or needing reminders to take medications, you may consider assisted living facilities. Residents live independently within a complex, but have staff to assist with

these tasks. Residents pay a monthly rent fee and then additional fees for required services. You will need to consider the monthly rental fee when considering this option as fees vary from one facility to the next.

## **Board and Care Homes**

Most individuals who reside in board-and-care homes are unable to live independently but do not require nursing home services. Medical assistance programs will pay for this type of living in some cases.

**In Conclusion** - *With any options, be sure to weigh the pros and cons and discuss the options with family members or those who will be involved in your care. One who requires long term care services may require a greater amount of care that may be difficult to obtain with the above mentioned options. For more information on any of these choices you may call Area 2 Agency on Aging at (574) 284-2644 or (800) 552-7928.*

## **Make a List**

Organize a list of the homes that you would like to inquire about. It is beneficial to obtain recommendations and information from friends and those you trust. You may also obtain names of facilities by looking in your local telephone book, or by contacting your local Agency on Aging or your local Ombudsman program. The Ombudsman program will not recommend one facility over another but can provide valuable information to you. With some advance planning and information, you will be equipped to make a well informed decision. You may also contact your clergy and religious affiliates, physicians who serve the elderly and volunteer groups that work with the elderly. If you happen to visit or make calls and find a waiting list, it may be wise for you to place your name on that list. This does not obligate you to move into that particular facility, but rather, will give you more options when the final decision is being made. Consider what specific needs you or your loved one may require, this may eliminate or add, facilities to your list.

[List of Local Nursing Facilities](#)

## **Plan a Visit**

This is one of the most important steps in the process as it will allow you to comparison shop. This allows you to talk with the staff, and the residents who receive care and live at the nursing home. Most nursing homes will provide you with a formal tour. It is important that you are not overly influenced by a guided tour alone. After the tour, you may return to some of the places you were shown and you may interact with some of the residents and staff. Be sure to respect resident privacy. You may also visit a nursing home unannounced, which will provide you with the opportunity to observe the day to

day environment. On your second visit, you may have an opportunity to look at things that you may have missed your first time through.

## On Your Visit

When you enter the facility, review the results of the Indiana State Department of Health Survey. By law, this report is to be accessible to residents and visitors. This survey report is an annual report compiled by State Surveyors that regulate the facility. The reports cite the facilities for areas of deficiency and the facility, in turn, will note their plan of correction for that particular citation. Keep these deficiencies in mind when touring. You may find all of the survey results on the internet by visiting [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov). This may be helpful in comparing those that you have chosen to consider.

Don't be afraid to talk with residents and their families. Use some of the questions at the back of this booklet to provide you with guidance. Talk to a variety of the staff, ask them what is involved in their specific departments.

**USE YOUR FIVE SENSES!** Let your senses guide you through your tour. Trust your instincts - if something doesn't feel right to you, it probably isn't. Remember sight, smell, touch, sound and taste. Are there unpleasant odors? What is the noise level? Are there numerous call lights going unanswered? Is the facility clean? Are residents participating in activities? Are the residents well groomed and dressed nicely? Do the staff members talk in a kind and friendly way to the residents? Are they interacting consistently with the residents? If visiting during a mealtime, does the food smell good? Does the menu look appetizing? Is the menu easy to follow?

Use a checklist to document and note specific things about each facility you visit. This will enable you to recall particulars when comparing and drawing to a conclusion.

## Understanding Finances

It is important that you understand how financing will be handled for a stay at each facility. Medicare is a federal program which helps pay certain health care expenses for people over 65 (and some younger disabled people). It pays for very little nursing home care, but may be helpful for short term stays following a hospitalization. Medicaid helps pay medical bills for people with low income and low assets. Understanding eligibility for Medicaid can be complicated and it is best to consult with someone who is knowledgeable on the subject. The Senior Health Insurance Program, the nursing home social worker, an attorney familiar with Medicaid Law and your county's medical assistance office are all good resources. Be sure to understand what is provided under the basic daily rate and what would be an additional cost. There are specifications regarding what a nursing home can and cannot charge extra for.

Also request a copy of the nursing homes' admission agreement and read through it thoroughly. Mark any areas that you may question or do not understand. You may ask the social worker, the administrator and also the admissions contact to clarify any questions you may have. Once the admission agreement is signed by the resident, it is a legal and binding contract.

## Making a Decision

When making this decision it is of utmost importance to include the prospective resident. That person should be involved in the placement decision since he/she is most affected by the move. One's individual legal rights to choose their own housing is extremely important.

Also keep in mind that if you make a decision that you are unhappy with, you can always shop around again and move to another facility that better suits you.

Making a decision can be difficult and stressful, and sometimes it seems overwhelming. Understanding your options and learning as much as you can about them will help you make the best possible choice.

### **Further resources to assist you in Choosing a Nursing Home:**

Phoning 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227)

#### [Resources/Links](#)

Contact your local library, local associations, your Area Agency on Aging and your Local Long Term Care Ombudsman program. (If internet service is not available to you, you may request this information from some of these sources).

## Nursing Home Questions and Checklist

### **General**

- ▶ How long have the current owner, administrator and director of nursing been with the facility?
- ▶ Has there been stability at these levels?
- ▶ Is there a written statement of resident's rights clearly posted?
- ▶ Are visiting hours convenient for residents and visitors?
- ▶ Who owns the nursing home and how does that person or organization get consumer input?

### **Medical Care**

- ▶ Is the home reasonably close to a hospital offering emergency services?
- ▶ How does the home assure regular medical attention?
- ▶ How often do physicians visit?
- ▶ Is transportation provided for medical appointments outside the building?
- ▶ Is there on site physical and occupational therapy?
- ▶ What is the turnover rate for nurses and nursing assistants?
- ▶ What is the staff to resident ratio?
- ▶ Are residents able to choose their own physician?

## **Resident Rooms**

- ▶ In shared rooms, does each resident have private space, room for individual belongings and space for visitors? How many residents share a bathroom?
- ▶ How are room changes and roommate concerns addressed?
- ▶ Is there locked storage available?
- ▶ Roommate privacy curtains?
- ▶ Are furnishings adequate?
- ▶ Do staff knock on the door and wait for an answer before entering rooms?

## **Environment**

- ▶ Are there individual room temperature controls?
- ▶ Air conditioning?
- ▶ Are there designated smoking areas and times?
- ▶ Smoke free?
- ▶ Are exits clearly marked?
- ▶ Are the grounds well lit?
- ▶ Are special considerations taken in the design of outside areas for residents with memory loss or wandering issues?

## **Dining**

- ▶ Are there interesting menu choices?
- ▶ Are there posted substitutions?
- ▶ Can residents choose seating?
- ▶ Are guests allowed?
- ▶ Are residents permitted to have food/snacks in their room?
- ▶ How are the dining rooms staffed?
- ▶ What are meal times?
- ▶ Do meals look appetizing?
- ▶ Is food served at the proper temperature?

## **Staffing**

- ▶ How many residents are assigned per nursing assistant?
- ▶ Is that different on other shifts?
- ▶ How are new staff screened and trained?
- ▶ Is there on-going training for all staff?
- ▶ Is there a volunteer program?
- ▶ Adequate social services, activities and therapy staff?
- ▶ Do staff members show genuine interest?
- ▶ Do they take time to visit with residents?

## **Residents**

- ▶ Do residents appear happy and content?
- ▶ Is there fellowship among residents?
- ▶ Is there a resident council?
- ▶ Resident newsletter?
- ▶ Family council?
- ▶ Are residents involved in the planning of menus and activities?
- ▶ How are residents notified and invited to care plan conferences?
- ▶ Are residents well groomed and nicely dressed?
- ▶ Do residents speak favorably of the home?

These are just a few of the questions that you should keep in mind and ask yourself when touring or determining which facility you will choose. Consult friends and others in the community for feedback on their experiences. With this information you will be able to make an informed decision on which facility best suits your or your family members needs.

Information provided by your local ombudsman along with adaptations from the HCFA Guide to Choosing a Nursing Home, MN Advocacy Center for Long Term Care, and the Medicare/Medicaid Guide to Choosing a Nursing Home.

**Provided by your local ombudsman  
REAL Services/Area 2 Agency on Aging  
1151 S. Michigan Street  
P. O. Box 1835  
South Bend, IN 46634  
1-800-552-7928**

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