



Choosing A Nursing Home

The difficult and emotional task of finding a proper nursing home for a loved one can be made easier through the use of available research and perseverance.

A pleasant environment with a caring staff and solid medical practices should be tops in a checklist to ensure the loved one gets the care needed and is safe and healthy during their stay.

The research is available from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services through its annual collection of data on over 15,000 nursing homes across the country. Health inspection data, staffing and quality information is used to rank the facilities on a one to five scale. For information on local areas, go to medicare.gov and click on the "nursing home compare" tool.

The site also offers a "Nursing Home Checklist" asking such basic questions as Medicare and Medicaid certification, level of care, special services available and if the home is close enough for friends and family to visit.

But, the list also asks if residents are clean and appropriately dressed for the season and time of day; if the facility appears clean and well-kept and has good lighting and comfortable temperature for residents.

The four-page questionnaire poses questions about the staff, rooms, hallways, stairs and bathrooms and encompasses a total of 50 items to check before considering a home.

Larry Minnix of the American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging told *The New York Times* that onsite inspection is vital. In an article entitled "Stressful but Vital: Picking a Nursing Home", Minnix said repeated visits are recommended and should be carried out at different times of the day and different days of the week.

"Trust your five senses," Minnix told *Times* reporter Walecia Konrad. "Does it smell like cleaning fluid and urine when you walk in or fried chicken and apple pie? Are the staff friendly and interacting with the residents?"

He recommended speaking with the executive director, physician and head nurse at the facility. If they are not available, ask for an appointment. Getting the runaround could serve as a red flag in consideration of the facility.

Picking the proper nursing home is important. Using the Medicare 50 question checklist for personal visits to those being considered can make the choice much easier for all concerned.

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