

CHOOSING A NURSING HOME (The AGS Foundation for Health in Aging)

Your family doctor or other health care provider (eg, home health nurses and social workers) can provide recommendations for nursing homes. Older adults and/or family members should try to visit as many places as possible to get a sense of what the place is like, including the overall atmosphere and quality of care. Using a checklist can help you evaluate quality, the range of services, convenience, and costs. Your visit may last an hour or two so that you can meet and talk with the admissions officer, nursing home administrator, head nurse, and social worker. Remember that no nursing home is perfect, and all will likely be very different from the current living situation.

Nursing Home Checklist

- Is the nursing home clean? Are there any unpleasant smells?
- Is it well maintained?
- Do the residents look well cared for?
- Are the rooms adequate?
- What recreational and private space is available?
- Are there safety features, such as railings and grab bars?
- Is the home licensed by the state and certified by Medicaid?
- How many nurses and nursing assistants are there compared with how many residents?
- Do the administrators and medical professionals have special training in geriatrics or long-term care?
- Are key professionals full-time or part-time?
- How long have the administrators and medical professionals been with the nursing home?
- What type of medical coverage is provided?
- How close is the nursing home to family members? How close is it to the nearest hospital?
- What is the food like?

- How much do basic services cost? What services are covered?
- What additional services are available? How much do they cost?
- What happens if a person runs out of money and needs medical assistance?

Nursing homes may often seem scary and depressing, and moving into one can fill people with a sense of betrayal and failure. Family involvement is important in helping the older person make the transition to a new living arrangement. Contrary to the stereotype, families do not abandon their loved ones by placing them in a nursing home. In fact, only a few nursing home residents are truly without any family. Family members are encouraged to visit residents regularly and to be involved in the total care of their older relative. Family members can offer companionship and assistance with the basic activities of daily living, and they may be better able to communicate the needs of the resident.