

Aging Wisely[™]

Comprehensive Care Management and Consultation

Choosing the Right Care Facility

Step one: It is important to begin with what your loved one needs. Each state and area varies in its offerings, and the terminology can be confusing. A good professional assessment from a *geriatric care manager* can determine what type of facility will offer the level of care needed for the specific situation. Particularly in Assisted Living, the range of care varies greatly. Specialty facilities exist that are better equipped to handle Alzheimer's Disease and some offer extended medical services onsite (note: in Florida, assisted living facilities are not required to have a nurse supervising though many go above basic requirements). Nursing homes may choose not to handle certain complex medical needs or take patients with certain diagnoses or needs.

Step two: Determine what your loved one can afford. If your parent has limited income and assets, explore benefit programs that may help them such as VA benefits and Medicaid (Medicare does not pay for long term care). If your parent had long term care insurance, find out if they are eligible for making a claim and the daily benefit and time limit. Costs and benefits may narrow your search and save you valuable time wasted on looking at facilities that are not an option due to finances.

Step three: Consider other factors. Think about optimal locations. If family or friends will visit it is important that it be convenient to encourage regular visits which will likely make it a better experience. Will your loved one possibly continue outside activities (i.e. church, visiting old neighbors or social groups)? Next, consider the environment and the personality and background of your loved one. Some people are more comfortable in a smaller, home like setting while others thrive with maximum activities. Will your loved one enjoy flexible dining options, desire a larger apartment, or take advantage of trips or certain activities? Will a fancy setting make your parent feel uncomfortable?

Step four: Visit and review the options. A professional opinion can provide significant information on the facility's care, history and pros and cons. You can talk to residents and families, as well as get opinions from neighbors, friends, and community members/professionals—but understand their situation may be different than yours and often an independent analysis from a *care manager* will yield better results. When you visit, assess the friendliness of the staff, longevity, appearance and happiness of residents, smell and cleanliness. Ask the facility for copies of their state inspections and research with your state regulatory office. It is important to meet and talk with staff other than the admissions/marketing staff so you can get a feel for the people who will be providing the daily care. Ask to visit for a meal to taste the food and observe/meet current residents. Review the activities offered as well as the services.

Step five: Make a short list and involve other family members as well as the “potential resident” in the final choice, where appropriate. Carefully review the contract and costs. Assisted Living Facilities have many different fee structures, from a flat rate to room and board with added care levels to charging a la carte for certain services. You may wish to have your attorney review the contract before signing as well.

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