



Fact Sheet: Visiting the Nursing Home

When you visit a nursing home, observe and evaluate the following:

Location

Consider the home's location. It is not always possible, but it is preferable for the home to be conveniently located for friends, relatives, and your doctor, as well as appealing to you. The home should also be reasonably close to a hospital in case of a medical emergency.

Licensure

Nursing homes are required to be licensed by the State Department of Health Services. Also, the administrator is required to be licensed by the Board of Examiners if Nursing Home Administrators. During your visit, you should ascertain the presence of the necessary licenses.

Facility Size

Consider the facility size. A large home may have more activities while a smaller home might be more personal. Decide which is best for your needs. You should also consider the quality, not just the quantity, of the services and activities offered.

Visiting Hours

Find out if the visiting hours are convenient. Often the best arrangement is one which allows visitors to come at any time.

Financing

It is very important to check the facility regarding what services Medi-Cal and

Medicare cover. Make sure that you find out what extra costs are involved in addition to the basic daily room rate. Often extra charges are made for professional services beyond basic nursing care (also for such things as television and toiletries). Some homes only provide the bare minimum in the way of services.

Room Selection

Ask if consideration is given to roommate and room selections, two factors which can be very important to a patient's happiness. One does not need to feel committed to the first roommate. If dissatisfied, request a change. Inquire about whether or not personal items, such as furniture, can be brought from the patient's home.

Valuables

Inquire how valuables are protected. Theft is sometimes a problem in nursing homes. If at all possible, valuable items should be left with friends or relatives.

Grievance Procedures

Ask whether patients have some sort of grievance procedure. Find out if there is a patients' council and a way the patients can be involved in decision making.

Rehabilitation

If the care plan includes rehabilitation therapy, find out which facilities in your area offer this service. Rehabilitation is a team effort and includes an occupational and physical therapist and possibly a speech therapist working with the physician, nurse, family and patient.

Morale

Observe the patients' appearance and morale. What is your impression? Do they have privacy? Are they treated with dignity and respect? Do they have access to things like television and radio?

Admission Procedures

Each nursing home, according to California law, must make available to the patient or his/her representative at the time of admission and on request written admission and discharge policies which explain the charges for care and extra services, limitations of services and refund policies. Read these policies carefully, and be sure you understand them. If anything is unclear, ask the administrator.

Nursing Services

Nursing services are one of the most important points to consider. The lack of proper training of staff is sometimes a problem in nursing homes. The home must have in-service education and development programs for the staff. Meet with the Director of Nursing. Is she/he willing to talk to you? How long had she/he been in the position? A rapid turnover of employees is not uncommon. Find out if a registered nurse is present in the afternoon and evenings. Also observe if patients are well groomed and treated well. Do they look clean and well cared for? Do they appear comfortable? Is their privacy respected? Are call lights answered quickly?

Medications

Notice how medications are given to patients. They should only be given by a licensed nurse, physician, or psychiatric technician. The family should consult periodically with the doctor and nursing staff to discuss the kinds of medications the patient is receiving. Sometimes the patient's mental attitude or personality changes as a

result of certain medications, and it is important that the family be aware of these changes. The average nursing home patient takes from four to seven different medications a day, so medication costs are an important economic consideration. The home is not permitted to require you to purchase or rent medical supplies or equipment from a particular pharmacy. If the home requests that you use a particular pharmacist or vendor, check whether the home has compared that pharmacy's medication prices to those of other pharmacies in the area. The pharmacy you choose is required to comply with reasonable policies and procedures of the home.

Resources

Southern Caregiver Resource Center

891 Kuhn Drive, Ste. 200
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Southern Caregiver Resource Center offers free support services to caregivers of adults with chronic and disabling conditions in San Diego and Imperial counties. Services include information and referral, needs assessments, care planning, family consultation, case management, individual counseling, legal and financial consultation, respite care, education and training, and support groups.