

## **Guidelines for Choosing a Care Facility, Group Home, Personal Care Home or Daily Assisted Living**

Adapted from The Caregiver Helpbook – Powerful Tools for Caregiving, Vicki L Schmall, PH.D., Marilyn Cleland, R.N., and Marilyn Sturdevant, R.N., M.S.W., L.C.S.W., 2000, Legacy Health Systems, pp. 204 – 213.

### **Step 1**

#### **Identify your needs**

- Make a list of your medical, social and emotional needs for example, assistance with incontinence, walking, transferring from bed to chair, eating, preparing meals, medications, grooming or dressing.

### **Step 2**

#### **Get Recommendations**

- Talk with people who have firsthand knowledge about local facilities.

### **Step 3**

#### **Talk to your Home Care Coordinator**

- Let them know what facility's you are interested in living at so they can get your name on a list for that facility.

### **Step 4**

#### **Screen by telephone**

- Calling first will narrow your choices of places to visit.
- Talk with the administrator or manager, admissions coordinator or director of nursing. They should be willing to answer your questions.

#### **You may want to ask the following questions:**

- What level of care and range of services does your facility offer? If your needs change, can you remain there?
- Can the facility meet my special needs? What about dietary needs?
- Is physiotherapy provided? If so, how often?
- What are the facilities admission criteria and procedures?
- What are the facilities policies and procedures regarding discharge?
- What are the facilities charges? Monthly, daily?
- What is included and what is extra?
- What are the charges for additional services and supplies? Ask for a written list of these fees.
- Is an advance deposit required? What are the billing procedures and payment policies? How often do fees change?
- Is a private room available? If not is there a wait list? How long is the list?

## **Step 5**

### **Visit Prospective Facilities**

- After you have completed your telephone screening, phone and make an appointment to visit the facility.
- If at all possible, try to take someone with you to visit the facility.
- Look at the total environment – residents, staff, physical facilities and activities.
- Observe residents and talk to families: Are they satisfied with the care they're receiving? Do they have complaints? What problems, if any, have they experienced? How has the facility dealt with the complaints?
- How does the staff interact with the residents? How does the facility appear? How do the residents look? Do they look happy? What are they doing? Does the food look appealing? How does the facility smell? Look at the rooms – do they feel homelike and reflect their personality?

## **Step 6**

### **Be Realistic**

- It's unlikely that any facility will meet all of your needs perfectly. You need to decide what are your **most important** needs and preferences.

### **What to look for in a care facility?**

Before visiting facilities, consider going through the following questions. Mark those questions which are most important to you.

#### **a. Atmospheres and attitudes**

- Observe carefully how staff interacts with residents.

#### Look for these things:

- Is the staff kind, caring, and friendly? Are they patient and gentle with the residents? Do they treat residents with respect and dignity?
- Does staff interact and speak warmly to the residents and show affection by words and touch? Or does staff talk primarily among themselves?
- Is staff pleasant to you? Do they respond directly and courteously to your questions and comments?
- Are visits welcome anytime?
- Are volunteers and community groups encouraged to be involved in the facility?
- Is there sensitivity to individual resident's social, emotional, and intellectual needs?
- Is respect given to the privacy needs of the residents?
- Are the staff appropriately dressed?
- Does staff respond promptly when a resident needs or asks for something?

A few important questions to ask about the atmosphere in relation to you are:

- Is the atmosphere one in which I will feel comfortable living in?
- Are there residents with similar backgrounds to me? For example, is there a younger population living in this facility or is it mostly seniors?

**b. Resident's Appearance**

- Personal appearance is important to everyone's self image. It also affects how staff and visitors respond to residents.
- Are residents appropriately dressed?
- Are residents well groomed? Are male residents clean shaven?
- Are residents out of bed?
- Are residents who need personal assistance well-groomed and appropriately dressed for the time of day and season?

**c. Location and Physical Environment**

- Is the facility's location convenient for family and friends to visit?
- Is the building safe, with well-lighted halls, handrails, clearly marked exits and sturdy equipment?
- Is the facility clean, pleasant and generally odor free?
- Does the building feel pleasant, cheerful and homelike?
- Are various areas of the facility easily accessible for someone using a cane, walker or wheelchair?
- Are there congenial and welcoming places for residents and visitors to meet, besides a resident's room?
- What is the noise level?
- Does the facility have good ventilation and a moderate temperature? Remember that heat can affect people living with MS so ask the staff how they can assist you when it becomes too warm in the facility for you.
- If residents share rooms, how is privacy provided?
- Are there lounges, gardens, kitchens, and other areas and equipment for the resident's use?
- What security is provided? To what extent does the facility assume responsibility for the security of a resident's personal possessions?

**d. Medical and Social Services**

- Does the facility offer the services you need and want?
- Will the staff make appointments for other medical services such as doctor, dentists, optometrists, etc?
- Is there a physician on staff?
- Are the family and resident encouraged to participate in the development of the patient care plan?
- How often is the care plan reevaluated?
- How do residents register complaints or make recommendations?
- Is there a residents' council where residents can express their concerns and viewpoints? If so, what is the level of participation?

- Is a social worker available to provide assistance to residents and families?
- Is there a program to support and involve families?
- Is there volunteer participation from the community? If so, how much?

**e. Activities**

- Is there a varied and stimulating activity program? Or are activities boring and childish?
- Are activities offered that are interesting and meaningful to your family member?
- What intellectual and mentally stimulating activities are available to mentally alert residents? How are the residents' spiritual needs met? Are residents supported in observing their religious preferences?
- Are there opportunities for residents to feel useful; to do something for others, if they are able?
- Are shopping trips or other community activities scheduled for those residents able to participate?
- Is someone able to assist with letter writing, opening and reading mail, or making telephone calls if you are unable to do so?
- Is assistance provided for residents to get to activities?
- Are family members encouraged to participate in activities such as special social events and holiday celebrations?

**f. Meals**

- Ask to see a sample menu. Try to observe one meal being served. Observe whether residents who need help eating get the help they need.
- Is a menu posted?
- Is the facility serving what is on the menu?
- Is there a selection of entrees at each meal?
- Is food served that you like?
- Are the meals well balanced, attractive, and appetizing?
- Is the food tasty?
- Are the food portions adequate?
- Is the dining area cheerful?
- Are special diets available for persons with specific health problems such as diabetes or difficulty swallowing?
- Will the facility meet someone's special dietary needs based on religion?
- Are residents given enough time to eat?
- Are snacks provided to residents? If so, when? What are typical snacks?
- Can family members arrange for guest meals? If so, what is the procedure?
- If residents need help getting to the dining room, will staff assist them or do they have to eat in their rooms?
- Is a tray available if a person cannot get to the dining room?

### **g. Policies**

- Facilities have policies regarding the use of personal furniture, conditions for admission, notification of the family when the resident's condition changes, visiting hours, and outings. Request a copy of the facility's policies and procedures and discuss them with the administrator or manager.
- Are visiting hours open (that is, may family and friends visit at will?)
- Are there restrictions on having visitors?
- Are accommodations available for overnight guests?
- Can residents bring their own furniture and mementos? Are there any limitations about what they can bring?
- Can food and drink be brought in for a resident?
- Can a resident have a pet in the facility? If so, what are the rules regarding pets?
- Can a favorite pet visit?
- Are young children encouraged to visit?
- If you smoke, is smoking allowed in the facility? Is the area safe and supervised?
- What is the policy for residents traveling outside of the facility?
- Under what circumstances would a resident be asked or forced to move? How much notice is given? What about refunds?
- What is the policy for holding a room if a person is hospitalized or needs a higher level of care for a period of time?
- What is the policy regarding medications? Who contacts the doctor? Who requests the changes?
- When is the family notified about changes in a person's condition?
- Can family members have access to a resident's chart?
- Who is responsible for contacting the house physician?
- In times of crisis, can the family visit during the night?