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How to make the best nursing home choice

Most people would rather grow old at home, surrounded by their familiar and treasured surroundings. Sometimes, however, this is not a feasible option. An elder who requires twenty four hour care may not be able to stay at home, as hiring caretakers may be prohibitively expensive for the elder, and his or her family. Family members often help care for a relative, in conjunction with a spouse. Nevertheless, there are times when such care becomes too much for a spouse and/or adult children, and a nursing home becomes the best option.

A recent article in Elder Law Answers (www.elderlawanswers.com) indicated that few things are more stressful than finding a nursing home for a loved one. Although there are no guarantees that nothing will go wrong, careful planning and research will help minimize bad experiences, and maximize the reassurance that the final choice of nursing home is the best choice that could have been made.

Some criteria suggested by Elder Law Answers include:

- **Location:** Visits by family members and friends is the single most important factor to insure quality of care and quality of life for the resident. Facilities who know that caring family members are watching often provide better care. Visits from the "outside" become the highlight of the resident's day or week. Choose a facility where it is easy for family and friends to visit the resident frequently.
- **Special needs** Look for a facility which is equipped to meet your loved one's special needs, including dementia care. Care for a dementia patient requires staff with special training. There should be sufficient staff, especially at night, to care for dementia patients. It is preferred that staff be assigned particular patients to insure continuity of care.
- **Personal needs:** Particular needs, such as religious or ethnic needs should be considered. If your loved one does not speak English, be sure that there are sufficient staff members available who speak that particular language.
- **References:** Ask for the names of family members of residents so that you may speak with them regarding the care that their loved one has received. Ask about staff responsiveness to their concerns.
- **Do research:** Medicare.gov and CareScout.com are two internet sites where you can obtain detailed information on nursing homes, particularly problems noted in the past. Find out who owns the facility and check on other facilities owned by the same company. Talk to the state long-term care ombudsman to see if any complaints have been filed against the facility.
- **Interview administration and staff:** Do not stop with the person marketing the facility. Talk to administrators and nursing staff about how nursing care plans are developed, and how they respond to concerns of family members.
- **Tour the nursing home:** What matters most is the quality of care, and the interactions between residents and staff. Observe how well the residents are cared for, and whether they are treated with respect. Don't forget to investigate the quality of the food service. Eating is both a necessity and a pleasure, and can be enjoyed long after many other enjoyable activities are no longer possible.