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Questions for Seeking Care in a Nursing Home During COVID19

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

In the present situation of the pandemic when visitation in nursing home facilities has been restricted, families have the agonizing task us choosing a facility for their loved one sight unseen. This can be gut wrenching and understandably a source of serious concern.

Firstly, if you are in an area where nursing home visitation remains restricted, you still want to consider the proximity of the facility for your convenience when visitation resumes. It's suggested you consider if the facility is near where you live, work or play (meaning if it's conveniently located to where you engage in recreational activities (i.e., a gym, etc)

I would suggest having a list of 3-5 facilities under consideration. Always consider the location: Is it conducive and convenient for visits from friends and family? Things to think about: it it where you or family live, work, play?

It's advisable to go through an interview process similar to the one you may be used when visiting. This list is not meant to be all-inclusive. You can cherry pick the questions that you feel are most important. You can also ask to speak with several different people in the facility over more than one phone call. This could include persons in the admission department, the director of nursing and the administrator.

Even if you cannot visit inside the facility, I would advise doing a drive by if possible.

Remember you are the customer, and this is a business that needs customers. Without customer's they would not be able to stay in business. All too often, people think because they or their loved one needs care, they are at the mercy of the nursing home. That is not the case.

QUESTIONS –OVER THE PHONE

These are few questions to get the process started, it is certainly not exhaustive in any way. You may have additional questions that you feel are pertinent which are not mentioned here. In addition, you may feel some of these questions are not relevant to the situation. However, based on experience, though they may not seem relevant initially, they can become important factors once in a building. Nevertheless, free to skip or eliminate asking those questions.
For further information, or a more complete list of questions, feel free to contact:

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In the event on site visitation resumes, these questions still apply. There are others that would be advisable to ask. In addition, trust your senses of sight, smell and hearing.

1. What insurance does the facility accept?
    - Medicare
    - Private Pay
    - HMO – if so, which ones?
    - Medicaid – are they affiliated with a waiver program?

2. What is the predominant language or culture of the staff?

This would be particularly important if you or your loved one speaks a language that is not spoken in the facility. As you can well imagine, this causes a variety of problems for both you/your loved one as well as staff members who are responsible for delivering care. Think of yourself requiring hospitalization in a foreign country in which you do not speak or understand the language of the staff and they do not speak or understand yours.

3. What are the visiting hours, outside of the COVID pandemic?
   Does the facility allow children and pets to visit?

According to Federal Law, family visits are allowed 24 hours/day; 7 days/week regardless of whether or not hours of visitation are posted and as long as the patient is in agreement. This extends to same sex and domestic partners. Of course, in the present pandemic situation that has been modified.

4. How often will my loved one and I be able to have a virtual visit and by what means?
    - Who conducts the visit?
    - Will the visit be conducted to ensure privacy?

5. Does your facility provide care for people with the following conditions/situations?
    - Alzheimer's Disease/Dementia
    - Wandering
    - Incontinence (urinary, bowel)
    - How many of the residents are wheelchair bound
    - Other neurological conditions (Parkinson's, Epilepsy)

6. What is the age range and the age of most of the residents in the facility?
   - What is the male/female ratio?
   - What is the average age?

7. How many citations or deficiencies has the facility had within the past three years?
   - Describe the citations
   - What has been done to correct the problem and prevent it from reoccurring in the future?

8. How often is the staff tested for COVID-19? How soon after testing are results available?

9. What Personal Protective Equipment are provided to staff?
   - How often are they provided with masks, gowns, etc.
     There are some facilities still only providing one mask/week. This is not considered appropriate to mitigate spread or control infection

10. Do they have an infection preventionist on staff? How many hours/day
    - Is the infection preventionist have other duties beside those related to infection Control?

MEDICAL INFORMATION

11. How soon after admission does the physician assigned visit the patient? How often does the physician visit the building? Is there a physician on staff? If not, how often do they visit the facility?

12. Will the medical staff consult with your private physician or specialists?

This is vitally important for patients under the care of neurologists, cardiologists, gastroenterologists, orthopedists or other specialists.

ROOM INFORMATION

13. What is the capacity of the facility? What is the current occupancy?
    - How many beds on the unit?
    - How many rooms are private? _____ Semi-private?_____
      Are there rooms with 3 bed or 4 beds? Yes_____ No_____
    - How do they determine roommates if there are 2,3 or 4 bedded rooms? Do they conduct an interview to determine roommate compatibility?

This may involve bed or wake-up times, volumes of TV, radio, etc. People who may be hearing impaired may turn up the volume which could affect their roommate. Other considerations: Light sleepers, people who snore loudly, etc.

STAFFING AND CARE INFORMATION

14. How many Registered Nurses? Day? (7 AM-3 PM)_____ Male _____ Female____Evening (3PM -11PM) _____Male____ Female____ Nights (11PM-7 AM)_____Male____ Female_____
Weekends (per shift & gender)_____ Holidays (per shift & gender)_____

Federal law requires an RN on duty in a building at least 8 hours each day, 7 days/week. In the event the facility does not meet this requirement, they are in violation of the law and could put your loved one's safety and well-being at risk

15. How many Licensed Practical Nurses? Male____ Female____ Per shift
Weekends (per shift) _____Holidays (per shift) _____

16. How many Certified Nurse Aides? Per shift? Male_____ Female_____
Weekends (per shift) _____ Holidays (per shift) _____

An example of an appropriate number would be no less than 4 for 40 residents during any shift.
In the event a facility implies that if they cannot meet the care needs of the person due to staff restrictions and implies you hire a private-duty aide to be available to meet your loved ones needs, you should know this is illegal. Essentially, they are encouraging you to provide the care that they are unable or willing to provide which is most probably a budgetary consideration in order to meet you or your loved ones needs. The Nursing Home is required by law to meet the care needs for each person. In the event you decide to hire a personal caregiver for your loved one, this is a choice and should never be a requirement for your loved one to receive the care they deserve.

17. What is the least amount of any of those staff members on the unit during any shift?

18. What is the staff turnover rate?
- How long has the director been at the facility?
- How long has the charge nurse been at the facility?
- What is the average length of employment of the CNAs?

19. How many times per week do patients receive a shower?

CLINICAL SERVICES

A person should be evaluated and begin treatment on the day of or within a couple of days following admission or unless there are medical or physical reasons why the patient is not able to do so.

20. How soon after admission will physical, occupational and speech therapy evaluations occur?
- If treatment is recommended, how soon after that will therapy begin
- How often is Physical Therapy available?
- How often is Occupational Therapy available?
- How often is Speech Therapy available?

21. Will the patient receive individual or group therapy? How often for each?
- Group or concurrent therapy should not exceed 25% of the total therapy time

This is important information. Under the new reimbursement model, many facilities are opting to provide group or concurrent therapy treatments This is not ideal for the patient to achieve maximum progress in the shortest period of time. However, in light of COVID19, depending on the state in which the facility is located, therapy is conducted individually in the person's room. Check on your individual state guidelines.

FOOD & DINING

22. Does your menu accommodate individual food preferences, allergies and dietary restrictions?
    - Are residents eating in a dining area or eating in their rooms?
    - Will there be someone to assist my loved one with eating if needed?
    - Will my loved one be able to eat according to their preferred schedule
    - Do you have foods available throughout the day? (i.e., this is often referred to as an anytime menu…what foods are available?