

“Evaluating Long-term Care Settings” (October 12, 2011)

When the transition to a long-term care setting is necessary for yourself or someone you love, it is important to visit potential sites and critically evaluate them. This holds true for home health agencies and adult day centers as well as facilities such as assisted living centers and nursing homes.

Though you are not able to visit a home health agency to see what kind of care they can provide, you can speak to the staff in order to determine a few key factors:

1. Is the agency available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to fill shifts if needed?
2. Does the agency provide medical care if needed, or only non-medical care? Typically individuals providing physical care in the home will obtain a home health certificate in order to become “home health aides”. These individuals should be incorporated into a care plan if the client needs any hands-on care because they are trained in body mechanics. If no medical care is needed, a companion can provide non-medical care.
3. What kind of training does the agency provide for staff and how regularly do these training sessions occur? If the client has cognitive deficits, do staff members understand how best to communicate to the client and ensure his/her safety in the home?
4. Is the agency “bonded” in the event that items go missing in the client’s home? If bonded, an agency will be able to reimburse the client for lost items.
5. Are staff members able to transport clients?
6. What is the plan for corrective action if staff members act inappropriately or the client cannot get along with staff member(s)?
7. Is there a minimum number of hours required daily?
8. Is there a discounted rate for services over a certain number of hours?

When visiting adult day centers, consider the following factors:

1. What is the level of interaction between staff and clients? Is it appropriate for the individual's cognitive and intellectual level?
2. Do staff members seem to enjoy being with the clients?
3. Is there a variety of groups and activities to suit everyone?
4. Do the clients look happy and content?
5. What types of services are provided during the day?
6. What are the credentials of the staff team? Do they have experience in geriatrics?
7. What kind of food is served and how often? Does it appear to be nutritious and appealing?
8. Are there resources available to family members such as support groups and social services as needed?
9. Is transportation provided?

As you tour assisted living facilities, nursing homes and continuing care retirement communities, evaluate the following areas:

(See 1-9 above)

10. What levels of care are available? Is there a specific unit for individuals with cognitive loss?
11. Does the environment seem well-designed for the residents' needs?
12. How many nursing staff are on shift per resident each day?
13. Do residents appear to be clean and well-dressed?

14. How is the facility decorated? Does it feel sterile or comfortable? Good natural light? Are there several spaces where residents and family members can congregate? Are residents encouraged to decorate their rooms? What are the limitations?

15. Are there comfortable outdoor spaces for the residents to gather?

16. Are family members welcome to visit anytime or are there specific visiting hours?

17. Is there flexibility in the daily routine (bathing, dressing, mealtimes...)

18. Is there a resident council that is involved in decision-making in the facility?

19. Are family members encouraged to be actively involved in the residents' care?

20. Are alternative and complementary therapies included in the residents' care plan if appropriate?

21. Are activities outside of the facility offered regularly?

22. Do outside groups (faith-based and non-faith based) visit regularly, including intergenerational groups and pet therapy groups?

For more questions to consider on your checklist, go to: http://www.caregiver.com/channels/ltc/articles/nursing_home_checklist.htm