



HOW - AND WHEN - TO FIND A RETIREMENT HOME FOR AN AGING PARENT



Caring for older adults with minor illnesses or reduced mobility issues is often easily incorporated into our lives. Caring for loved ones with serious illnesses, however, may be impossible and probably requires the ongoing intervention of trained healthcare providers. Caring for a parent with dementia or Alzheimer's disease is more stressful than caring for physically frail older adults because of the problems specific to dementia – disorientation, shifts in personality and physical limitations. When symptoms signal the increased need for supervision, a retirement home may be the best solution for all concerned.

If you are unsure of how to read the symptoms or make a diagnosis, it may

be best to start with an MMSE – the Mini-Mental State Examination – which assesses the level of cognitive impairment. In older patients, cognitive functioning is especially likely to decline during illness or injury. An assessment of an older adult's cognitive status, usually by a nurse, is instrumental in identifying early changes in physiological status, ability to learn, and evaluating responses to treatment. The MMSE is an 11-question measure that tests five areas of cognitive function: orientation, registration, attention and calculation, recall and language. The maximum score is 30. A score of 23 or lower is indicative of cognitive impairment. The MMSE takes only 5-10 minutes to administer, and it is, therefore, practical to use repeatedly and routinely. It is not a complete clinical assessment, but a starting point in getting a full assessment of caregiving needs.

Nursing homes offer the most extensive care a person can get outside a hospital. In addition to room and board, they provide help with custodial care – like bathing, getting dressed and eating – as well as skilled care, given by a registered nurse. This could include medical monitoring and treatments as well as services provided by specially trained professionals, such as physical, occupational, and respiratory therapists. There are also usually social and recreational activities in retirement homes.

IT CAN TAKE TIME TO FIND A SUITABLE NURSING HOME

Finding the right nursing home takes time. It is essential to begin the search for a suitable nursing home well in advance of seeking admission since there are often waiting lists. Planning also can make the transition of moving into a nursing home much more manageable. Retirement homes can cost between \$1,500 and \$5,000 per month, depending on your region and the level of services and care that are offered and required.

After assessing your needs and resources, make a short list of retirement homes and give them a trial run. Go for a complimentary lunch, talk to other residents and staff, note the maintenance and overall cleanliness. Do the residents look clean and adequately dressed? Look for the posting of fire regulations and evacuation routes. How safe is it – are there handrails and non-slip floors, and are the rooms well-lit? Find out the policy on insurance and personal property. Is there a written plan for the care of each resident, and how often is an assessment done? It is also important to find out what furnishings you can bring, and whether or not the telephone and TV are included or possible. When you visit the home, take part in the activities and check out the food. Is drinking water easily accessible? You might even want to book a one-week stay, to see for yourself what it's like to live there – no harm in planning ahead.

RETIREMENT HOME QUICK CHECKLIST

- Do the residents look clean and adequately dressed?
- Look for the posting of fire regulations and evacuation routes.
- How safe is it – are there handrails and non-slip floors, and is it well-lit?
- Find out the policy on insurance and personal property.
- Find out what furnishings you can bring, and whether or not the telephone and TV are included or possible.
- Is there a written plan for the care of each resident, and how often is an assessment done?
- Check out the food – is it edible? Is drinking water easily accessible? Malnutrition and dehydration are common afflictions among seniors.

BENEFITS OF A NURSING HOME

Placing an aging parent in a home can be good for both of you. It represents a change of routine for the care recipient and the opportunity to socialize and develop other relationships that can promote independence. For caregivers, it can free up time to concentrate on other family matters and activities without the distraction of caregiving tasks. Your visits to your parent will be social and will involve quality time rather than necessary, repetitive tasks, which can lead to burn-out.

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