

Taking the Stress, Worry, and Confusion out of Choosing a Nursing Facility

Dr. Charles Crecelius, MD, CMD, AMDA president and a medical director in Missouri, talks about how to work with your physician to choose the right facility for your loved one.

AMDA urges families to work with their physician to make sound decisions about placing a loved one in a long term care facility. Before you look for a facility, be sure your loved one's condition and support systems have been fully evaluated. These evaluations can help you decide whether your loved one is ready for nursing facility care and what type of setting might be best for him or her.

Early onset Alzheimer's disease or dementia is a common reason that a person enters a nursing facility. However, there are many diseases of aging that may contribute to someone's need for special care. Talk to your doctor about your loved one's needs and all possible options for care and assistance. If Mom or Dad wants to stay at home, your physician can help you decide if this is possible; or he or she can suggest options such as home care, assisted living facility, or continuing care retirement community.

► What You Can Do

Choosing the right facility or setting for a loved one calls for homework. Find out what facilities have the type of location, services, cost structure, and other qualities your loved one needs. Ask your doctor—as well as a hospital discharge planner, clergy member, and others—for their opinions about area facilities.

It also is important to visit facilities, talk with staff, and ask questions about issues such as staff-to-resident ratio, meals and food choices, activities and recreation, patient preferences and choices, and medical services. Visit at meal times to find out how the food tastes and how residents are served. Watch how staff talks and acts with residents and greets and talks to visitors and other staff members. Don't be shy about asking questions.

If possible, it is useful plan ahead so that you don't have to choose a facility in a hurry or during an emergency.

Remember that you have to the right to choose the doctor, called the "attending physician," who will care for your loved one in the facility. Patient choice

is important in long term care, and your doctor can help make sure that your loved one is treated with the respect and kindness he or she deserves and gets the care he or she needs.

► Questions to Ask Your Physician

- Can you care for my loved one in the facility? Or can you recommend a doctor who can meet my loved one's special needs?
- How will I be told about changes in condition or urgent problems my loved one has?
- Does the facility have programs to meet my loved one's special needs and interests?
- What facility might best meet the financial resources of my loved one?
- What can I do to make my loved one's move to the facility easier?
- What kind of facility—skilled nursing facility, assisted living facility, or other choice—might be best for my loved one?
- How can I find out if a nursing home has a good track record?
- Is the facility medical director a certified medical director? Does he or she have special geriatric training or experience?

For more information, see:

- www.amda.com/consumers/choosingahome.cfm
- www.thehealthpages.com/articles/ar-nrshm.html
- www.nccnhr.org/public/50_155_3274.cfm
- www.medicare.gov/Publications/Pubs/Pdf/NHguide.pdf
- www.niapublications.org/agepages/longterm.asp
- AMDA 800-876-AMDA (2632)



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