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# 10 Steps and Considerations in Selecting a Skilled Nursing Home

 By [Eileen Austin](#)

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Selection of a nursing home is frequently done under the pressure of an emotionally driven event. It is never an easy task but the following questions can help your search..

**1. What kind of nursing home do you need?** There are several different types of homes and the selection criteria is based on type of care needed and finances available. Facilities with rehab areas provide residents with opportunities to gain strength, balance, and increased mobility. They can also help with selection and outfitting of the proper ambulatory devices such as wheelchairs and walker. Typically both Occupational and Physical Therapy are offered.. You have facilities that only accept Medicare and not Medicaid residents. Medicare covers fully only 20 days of therapy and partially another 80 days. These facilities frequently require residents to move

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after Medicare is finished. Other facilities accepts both Medicare and Medicaid so residents do not have to move at the end of 20 days. There are also private nursing homes which do not take either Medicare or Medicaid. but expect the people to pay their total costs.

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**2. Is location a consideration?** Do you need a facility that is out of state or can you move the family member closer to other family members? Proximity to other family members can be a real plus for everyone involved.

**3. Are there certain activities desired by the person?** Some facilities provide not only in facility activities but provides access to other activities such as eating out, baseball games, plays etc..

**4. Is a religious affiliation of a facility important?** If ability to attend religious services or eat a kosher diet important, it should be added to your list. While most facilities provide some religious services, it may not be enough.

**5. Using type of facility, location, programs and religious facility, make a list to work from.** Each state has a web site listing licensed facility by county. Information is provided on the previously developed list. You can limit the number of facility that you want to check this way. You will be amazed by wealth of material available.

**6. Making initial visits.** Using your short list, you should plan to visit each facility at least once and the best ones several times at different times of days. You should visit midday when the admission and financial people are there. Other visits should be made at mealtime, evening and even on a weekend. Notice how the residents are dressed and where they are. Large numbers positioned around the nursing stations is not a good sign. Observe a mealtime to see what is being offered and how served. Do the residents seem to enjoy it. Look for postings of menus and activities. Talk with residents and family members. Look around the area of the facility for any safety concerns such as bodies of water or busy roads.

**7. Making follow-up visits.** You should be down to a couple of facilities. Now it is time to talk specifics with the facility such as costs, Medicare/Medicaid, private pay, special needs such as a private room or protection from wandering. Not all facility are locked 24/7 so you need to be honest about security needs. If the primary physician does not follow nursing home patients, who does the facility uses. What services are included and what are not? Many services may be offered in house and but charged to patient such as beauty shop, dentist, optometrist, and podiatrist.

**8. Taking your loved one to visit.** After you know a facility is suitable and affordable, bring your loved one to visit. Try to limit the number of facilities visited because it can be stressful. Showing the person the exact room and introduction to future roommate can be a big help in adjustment.

**9. Preparing for arrival.** Take a few personal objects like pictures even for a short stay. Good athletic shoes are necessary if rehab is planned. Clothes should be easy off and on. All things should be labeled such as clothes, dentures, glasses, and hearing aides. Do not take everything at once.

**10. Adjustments.** Meetings are usually held early in the stay, Please try to participate in them as they can be very helpful. If there are problems, report them at the time when they can be fixed. Be reasonable about requests, staffing is less than hospitals.

This article was designed to help people and their families to make that difficult choice when a skilled nursing facility or nursing home is recommended. There are many excellent facilities and very caring capable staff. Many people are rehabilitated in the skilled nursing facilities and return home. Families need to continue to visit and to monitor care for best results. It is not end of world though it may seem so initially.

Eileen Austin, RN, ED.D, Consultant, Educator, Certified Geriatric Care Manager and Certified Dementia Practitioner. She has worked as a nurse and risk manager in a variety of settings included nursing homes. She has taught all levels of nursing programs. She is Program Director and Instructor in University of Florida's online Geriatric Care Management program. She is a member of both National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Manager and Florida Health Care Care Managers.



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