

Elder Tips:
Choosing a Nursing Home
...provided as a courtesy by Maryhill Manor of Niagara

Many times the decision for admission into a long term care facility is suddenly thrust upon us when our loved one is in the hospital following a fall or acute illness, begins to decline and cannot care for themselves, or their memory fails.

Finding the “right” place is a difficult and emotional decision for the elder adult and those who are helping them to choose, whether it be for short term recovery or long term care. It is a good idea to look into the facilities in your area to see what services are available before they are needed, so your decision making can reflect the goals you and your family have.

One of the most important considerations is the type of care needed. Different facilities offer different levels of care and are better suited to meet the needs of a particular elder population. You’ll want to tour the facilities in your area to see what services are available at each building. Many times it’s not the “closest” facility which offers the services you want and need so even though convenience is an issue, the care and treatment options are of greater importance to your recovery.

Here are a few Questions to Ask and Tips to Follow when you are looking at a Long Term Care Facility for either short term recovery or long term care.

1. What level of care will I or my loved one need? Is this for short term recovery after illness or injury or for a longer term stay?

Skilled facilities offer more extensive clinical services, and many times higher level staffing skills, such as 24 hour per day RN coverage, Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and Speech Therapy on-site. You will want to find out what the staffing of the building is as well as the availability of therapies and other ancillary services. Another question to ask is whether the building has an active Restorative Program to help the elders maintain their independence.

If coming as a patient from the hospital, it is important to know if the Skilled Facility is Medicare Certified. If you meet the Medicare qualifiers you will then be able to access Medicare benefits as payment for Skilled Nursing and/or Rehabilitative Care.

Knowing if the building has experience in working with certain types of persons is helpful. Check to see if staff is trained in dementia care and care of Alzheimer’s clients. Find out if there is a special care unit for Alzheimer’s and related dementia cares, if needed for safety. Watch programs and interactions to see how staff respond to persons with mental status declines.

2. When should I tour? What should I look for? How do I get more information from the facility?

To speak with someone about the facility and your or your family member’s needs you can call and make an appointment with the person involved with admissions. Often that will be the Social Worker. They will take information from you, show you around the facility, and can tell you about the types of services provided. They can also answer questions you may have about short term or long term stays.

The Social Worker can also provide you with contact information for county programming to answer questions about payment not covered by Medicare. If you meet certain asset levels, Medicaid may be available to help with the costs. Ask if they accept both Wisconsin and Michigan Medicaid.

You can visit whenever you are able. Evenings, weekends, mealtimes, special events, or other unscheduled times can give you the “flavor” of the facility and help you in your decision-making. Look for the Calendar of Activities to see whether there are many different types and offerings you or your loved one can participate in when not in therapies or resting.

When you are in the building look to see how the staff interact with the residents. Are staff helping the elders? Do the elders look happy and relaxed? Are they well groomed and dressed nicely? Are there activities in progress? Is there a full calendar of different types of events for those living there to join in? Are families welcome and encouraged to be involved?

Check to see whether the building is clean and odor-free. Certain odors may periodically occur, but there should be no lingering “odors”.

Visit during mealtimes and you will see how staff assists residents with dining as needed, and how the meals served smell. Does the building appear well-lit? Are resident rooms of good size and personalized by the elders living there? Is there one bathroom in EACH room or will the Elder need to share between two rooms?

3. Is there any other place I can find out about a particular nursing home?

You can log onto the Internet to the Medicare.gov website and click on “Nursing Home Compare” to check other statistics about buildings in your area. Information found there is 6-12 months old and does not provide detailed explanation about the data listed. *Talk with the facility you are interested in so they can answer your questions, give you a clearer idea of what the information means, and how the facility is addressing it.*

Another way to find information is during your visit. When touring, look for the posted copy of the nursing home’s most recent state survey (inspection) and ask about the results. Look to see that there is adequate RN, LPN, and Nursing Assistant staffing on duty. You may wish to ask about the normal staffing patterns of the facility when you speak with the Admissions Coordinator.

Choosing the “right” place to best help you to recover quickly and return home, or give you the piece of mind of knowing that your loved one is well cared for is difficult. If we at Maryhill can assist you, please call Cindy, our Social Worker, and she will be happy to answer what questions you might have. Our phone number is (715)251-3172.

Elder Tips are offered as a courtesy by:

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