

Questions To Ask When Visiting Residences

It is important that you look at more than one facility when making this important decision. Talk to the caregivers and residents. Narrow down your choices, and (if possible) arranged to be there for a meal or an activity. Inquire about visiting unannounced and do that if possible. If it not advised to show up unannounced, you will want to hear a very good reason why. Ultimately, you want to know what the place looks and smells like without them prepping for your visit!

Living Arrangements

Consider the location and whether it's acceptable to you.

How is the appearance to you? Do you feel comfortable with their décor?

Were you greeted in a friendly manner by the staff and residents?

Is the available room a good size for you or your loved one?

What activities do they have posted and do they actually follow the schedule?

How does the menu look?

Do the residents have any say in what is cooked?

Is the food nutritious?

Can they accommodate a diabetic, renal care or other special needs diets? Is there a set time for dinner?

Can you eat where you want (in your room, at the dining room table, in the living room, etc.)?

Is there community transportation offered?

Are residents permitted to decorate their own door, hallway, patio or garden?

How many bathrooms are there, and are they shared?

What do residents like most/least about this facility?

When talking with other residents, do they seem like they are happy and does it appear to feel like home to them?

Can you picture yourself or your loved one living there? Can you foresee getting along with the caregivers and residents?

Do they allow pets?

Do they accept Medicaid and private pay residents?

Physical Facilities

Is the facility clean, organized and odor-free?

Are there door alarms and how do they work (all systems differ)?

Are there individual options for someone to control the temperature in their room?

Are the bathrooms equipped with grab bars, transfer chairs, etc. and are they wheelchair accessible?

Is the room furnished or unfurnished?

Is there adequate storage for clothing and personal belongings?

Is there a safe outdoor space for sitting, relaxing and visiting?

Is there a private room available for family gatherings, birthdays, etc.? If not, will the facility accommodate personal celebrations?

Are their books and magazines are in the library?

Does the facility allow assistive devices like scooters and, if so, what is their policy on storing them, charging them, etc.?

Are housekeeping and laundry services provided?

Are there other services available onsite (hairdresser, nail care, lessons, bank, post office, etc.)?

Can out-of-town guests be accommodated?

Can a resident move to a different unit if desired?

Social Atmosphere

Are residents engaging with each other in small or large groups?

Is there an active Resident's Council Voice? What issues are they currently handling? Do they feel like they are making progress?

What are the alcohol and smoking policies?

Are there opportunities for residents to volunteer onsite? If so, doing what? Can the facility help them to find activities off-site to volunteer with?

Services

What medical and nursing services are provided?

How many staff members are working and what is the ratio of staff to resident?

Are there doctors and nurses on-site? If so, how many and how often?

Is there a social worker to help coordinate care plans, admissions, discharges and quality of care evaluations while living there?

What type of medication management and administration is provided? Do they re-order meds? Are you required to use their pharmacy?

Is there a written medication-handling policy? What method do they use? Will they offer a copy to you?

Does the resident have choices regarding doctors, caregivers, etc.? How are medical emergencies handled?

Who is notified in the event of a medical emergency, and in what timeframe do you notify someone?

What are the policies for the POLST, Advance Directives and Do Not Resuscitate orders? Where do you store these?

Does the facility help with scheduling of medical appointments?

Does the facility schedule transportation for medical appointments?

Can spouses be accommodated at this facility? Do you allow spouses to share rooms?

Once admitted, can a person move into a higher level of care if their needs increase, and then back to independent living when they're capable?

How often are a resident's needs assessed and updated?

Is assistance with ADLs (activities of daily living) available 24/7?

Is there someone awake and available to assist 24 hours a day?

What happens if the resident is admitted to the hospital and has to go to rehab or skilled nursing to recover?

Is there an assessment performed prior to admission and what does this entail?

Fees & Documentation

Is there a waiting list?

What are the entry fees (base rate) and subsequent monthly payments?

What are the itemized expenses for additional care, such as assistance with ADLs, diabetic issues, incontinence, etc.?

Ask for a copy of the contract that breaks all of this down for you – you will want to compare monthly rates and add-on (additional care) rates when considering a home.

Can I place a room on hold with a deposit?

Are there additional fees for phone, cable, internet service, etc.?

How are fees affected if a resident moves to the assisted living or skilled nursing facility, either temporarily or permanently? How are fees affected if a resident is admitted to the hospital?

Based on fee increases over the past several years, what increases in fees can be anticipated annually? What is the 10-year history of fee increases?

What happens if a resident outlives his/her resources?

Are residents required to obtain insurance for personal property?

What happens if personal finances are depleted? Are there resources to help a resident stay in the home of their choice?

Contracts

Make sure you read the contract, fees, and rules carefully before signing.

Do you understand the contract? Is the staff person patient and helpful in explaining it?

Is there a copy of the contract available for you to take to review today? This will help you to compare when you are making your final decision.

What is the refund policy?

If you are a family member or loved one, be sure to ask the facility to give you a disclosure form when you are signing contracts. Technically, the facility cannot discuss the care needs of the residents with you or anyone unless there is one of the following on file with them: Power of Attorney, Guardianship, Conservatorship (which is technically only regarding their finances) or signed permission for them to talk to you about the resident's health and well-being.

Administration

How is the facility owned, governed, licensed and administered?

Where are their public postings, and what (if any) violations have they received in the last year? Legally, facilities are required to post their violations in a public area for 12 months after the date they received the violation.

How long has the facility been in existence and how long have the staff members worked there?

Are administrative personnel willing and available to meet with you?

Is the administrator a licensed professional?

What additional training and certification does the staff have?

Care Plan

What is the process for identifying and addressing residents' needs?

How often is the care plan reassessed?

How are the resident and the family involved in developing the care plan?

What role will the family play in implementing the care plan?

Who makes the decision about moving to a different level of care? Who explores appropriate options and makes arrangements?

How are transitions between levels of care handled?

Under what circumstances is the family contacted?

Transfer/Discharge

On what grounds might the facility terminate or discharge a resident? What are the financial consequences?

Additional TIPS

The licensing requirements and regulatory records for these facilities are posted online, but you can also visit the local Senior Services (Aging and People with Disabilities Office, a branch of Department of Human Services) to discuss a facility's standing with the State of Oregon. This is a great way to gain a little insight into the quality of care you might expect from that facility.

Understand, however, that no home or facility is going to be perfect. Just because someone has no violations, it does not make them the best home, and just because another home has more, it does not make them a bad home. You will want to look for repeat offenses and what type of repeat offenses. You want to know that they can learn from their mistakes. Recognize that violations can be written for many trivial things (like forgetting to label food in a refrigerator, or not having enough paper towels in the bathroom), in addition to major things like malfunctioning smoke alarms, abuse of the residents, or mistakes with medications.

It is the major violations AND repeat offenses by the facilities that cannot learn, or do not make the effort to improve that you will want to focus on. These facilities are operated by human beings, and the beauty of that is humans are mostly compassionate and considerate (knowing that we will all need this care someday) – especially those who choose caregiving as a profession. Humans make mistakes and mistakes are bound to happen no matter where you place your loved one.