

## When it's Time to Think of a Nursing Home

By Herbert P. Weiss

Until there is a crisis, families don't think about nursing home care until it's too late, says Grace Lebow of Bethesda-based Aging Network Services, a consulting and care management company. If you can, plan ahead, Lebow suggests.

Your local area agency on aging provides a comprehensive list of nursing homes to review.

Once a list of nursing homes is compiled, "You need to know if the facility is reputable," says Lebow.

Word of mouth or personal recommendations from friends, neighbors, hospital social workers, clergy and physicians about a nursing home's care are key bits of information to determine if the nursing home is well run.

Lebow has other suggestions in investigating nursing home care:

Call the nursing home ombudsman at your aging agency. They'll tell you how a nursing home rates in surveys or if undue complaints are filed.

Be wary of many complaints. Watch

out for repeated complaints about the same type of violation.

Personal finances play a major role in selecting a nursing home. Some nursing homes won't take Medicaid eligible individuals or those who will

become eligible within a year.

This screens out a certain number of nursing homes during the selection, eliminating those nursing homes who only take private pay patients.

A nursing home's location is another consideration. The facility must be close to family or friends. It's important for nursing home residents to have visitors.

Even if it's the best nursing home in the community, being inaccessible may

diminish its value.

When looking for a nursing home, make sure the individual's medical needs are met, according to the following levels of care:

Skilled Nursing Care is intensive 24-hour-a-day nursing care offering restorative therapies.

Intermediate Care Facilities provide room and board with less intensive

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## Health Care at Home

by Ellen Berlow

Only about five percent of older people are in nursing homes. Many elderly who have disabling health problems remain at home assisted by family or friends. But for many older people living alone or in households with working adults, a growing network of health care agencies offer home care assistance ranging from high-tech medical services to homemaker services that help with basic daily activities.

Older people who once had to remain in the hospital for long periods of time can now be cared for at home as advanced equipment and services - such as physical therapy, renal dialysis, ventilator care, chemotherapy - are becoming available on an at-home basis. "Home care is changing as technology changes," says one health care specialist. "With portable equipment, hospital services can come to the home."

Inova Home Care, affiliated with the Fairfax Hospital system, is one agency that offers a range of professional services from skilled and practical nursing care to speech and physical therapy to home health aid for bathing,

dressing and other personal needs. Family and Nursing Care, a Silver Spring agency, offers the services of skilled nurses, nurse's aides, homemakers and companions for a variety of home care needs.

Of the 12,000 home care agencies nationwide, more than half are certified by Medicare, the federal health insurance program providing benefits to the elderly. Standards for non-Medicare participating agencies vary from state to state. Recommendations for home care services can be obtained from your doctor, hospital or area aging agency.

Some guidelines to consider when choosing a home care agency:

- Does the agency provide 24-hour service?
- Is the agency licensed and bonded?
- How long has the agency been operating?
- What is the reputation of the agency among social service departments of local hospitals?
- Does the agency accept Medicare, Medicaid, or insurance payments or does the consumer pay the agency directly?

For a free booklet, "How To Choose a Home Care Agency", write: Foundation for Hospice and Home Care, 519 C Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002.



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**Nursing Home**

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nursing care.

Keep an individual's needs in mind when looking for a nursing home. Today, many facilities specialize in taking care of Alzheimer residents. Special environmental designs include outdoor protected areas to keep wandering residents safe.

Upgraded services, special therapies, dietary needs, and religious needs should also be taken into account.

"You can't get much information about a nursing home through phone calls", says William Eggbeer, vice president of marketing for Silver Spring-based Manor Care. "There's a lot to be gained by visiting the facility."

Once the choices are narrowed, "comparative shop," Eggbeer says. Visit your favorites, even make a second visit to your top two choices.

When visiting a facility, walk

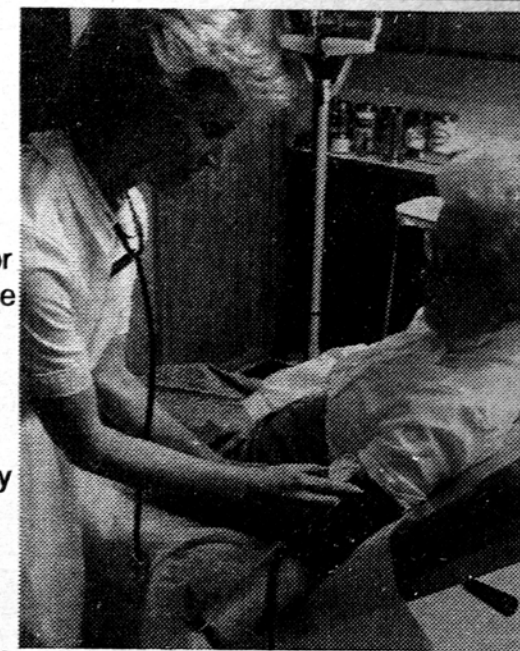
through the halls and speak with residents, attend activities, eat a meal, talk with the administrator and staff members.

Ask the administrator for information on the use of nurse agency registries. A large staff turnover and a high percentage of nurses from these registries may reduce quality and continuity of care.

Beware of hidden costs. Ask the administrator whether the rate quoted during the visit includes room and board or extras.

Once a nursing home is selected, put your name on the waiting list. Fill out the paperwork in advance in case a medical emergency requires quick placement.

Get your financing straight. Before entering a nursing home, call the local Department of Social Service to determine



Intermediate Care Facilities provide room and board with less intensive nursing facilities.

Medicaid eligibility.

It's an important decision to place a loved one in a nursing home. Through proper planning, the most appropriate fit will be found.

*Herbert P. Weiss is a freelance writer specializing in health care and aging topics.*

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