

CHOOSING A LONG TERM CARE FACILITY

LONG TERM CARE FACILITIES SERVE A WIDE RANGE OF INDIVIDUALS

LONG TERM CARE IS NOT JUST FOR THE ELDERLY...

Long Term Care Facilities serve a wider group of people than just the elderly. Many of them provide care to otherwise healthy people who are recuperating from a serious injury or illness, and/or to those individuals whose chronic disabilities make independent living impossible. A young adult with advanced multiple sclerosis would fall into this second category.

PLACEMENT IS A DIFFICULT DECISION

Placing a relative or friend in a Long Term Care Facility is a stressful process, not only for your loved one, but also for you, your family and friends. To help relieve immediate concerns and ease the transition, you should involve both your loved one and family members in facility selection. While this task initially may seem overwhelming, some important basic knowledge will help you through the facility selection process.

BASIC CONSIDERATIONS

Although Long Term Care Facilities share a common set of goals and purposes regarding resident care, each one has certain areas of expertise, offers specific services, and specializes in serving a particular clientele. In other words, one Long Term Care Facility may be better suited to your loved one than another. There are some basic issues to consider when exploring your options, including the following:

- Who will pay for long term care services?
- Does the state Medicaid program pay for assisted living care?



- Does the facility accept Medicare and Medicaid?
- Will a Medicare/Medicaid bed be available after personal funds are depleted?
- Does the facility require that assets be assigned or held in escrow (sometimes called a Life-Care Contract)?
- Is the location convenient for family and friends?
- Does the location reflect the loved one's preference (i.e., urban vs. rural)?
- Are specialized services offered for certain disabilities (e.g., Alzheimer's Disease)?
- Are hospice services available?



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BEYOND THE BASICS

There are thirteen important steps that you, your loved one, and family or friends should take to ensure that the Long Term Care Facility selected is the most appropriate placement possible. These steps are:

- Obtain **references** from people who have a good knowledge of the facility, such as a physician, hospital discharge planners and social workers, long term care professionals, and others.
- **Visit** the facility. If scheduled tours or visits are offered, take advantage of those opportunities. Unscheduled visits also are advised, particularly to observe the interaction between staff and residents.
- Check the **licensing and accreditation** status of the facility, as well as the training, licensing and credentialing requirements of medical professional and non-professional staff.
- Determine **appropriateness of location**. Does your loved one like the location of the facility? Is the location a convenient one for family and friends to visit?
- Look at the facility's **appearance and design**. Does it have a welcoming feel? Is it clean? Are there outdoor areas for residents to enjoy? Is parking available? Are safety and security measures in place?
- Check out the **attitude of staff**. Does staff make the facility warm and inviting? Are they respectful? Does staff take the time to answer questions, hear complaints and resolve problems?
- Examine the **bedrooms and bathrooms**. Does each bedroom have a window? Are the bathrooms clean, safe, convenient and handicap accessible? Is there a comfortable chair for every resident?
- Inspect the **dining facilities**. Is the dining room comfortable, and is the food tasty and attractively served? Are special dietary needs accommodated? Is oral and tube feeding available?
- Ask about the offerings for **resident activities**. What sort of planned activities are available? Can residents pursue their hobbies? Are outside trips planned?

- Understand **resident care services**. Is there an arrangement in place with a local hospital for transport and care if necessary? Are physical, occupational and/or speech therapy available?
- Understand **resident rights**. Does the facility have a written description of the residents' rights and responsibilities, and is it available for family review? Does the facility respect resident privacy?
- Understand the **cost structure**. Are most services covered in the basic daily rate? If not, is a list of non-covered services available? What are the policies concerning payment source?
- Assess **friend and family involvement**. Can family and friends ease your loved one's transition to a Long Term Care Facility by visiting regularly?



Excerpted by Elisabeth Belmont, Esq., MaineHealth, Portland, ME. For a checklist of questions to ask regarding these topics, please see the American Health Lawyers Association's *A Guide to Legal Issues in Life-Limiting Conditions* which can be downloaded on a complimentary basis at www.healthlawyers.org/LifeLimiting.