Is This the Nursing Home to Choose?

The following checklist provides an objective way to compare nursing homes. Each person has a different situation; not all of these are applicable. However, ask or think about some of these things, to provide clarity for decision-making. Be sure that the individual who will be residing in the nursing home has the opportunity to visit and provide input before a decision is finalized.
BASIC SERVICES

Nursing Care
- Is there a focus on helping residents maintain independence?
- Does the nursing home have hospice services?
  - How do they manage pain control?
- Are nurses who specialize in wound care and ostomy care available?
- Does the nursing home have ways to address problems such as bed sores and incontinence?

Rehabilitation
- Are special therapies available? In-house? Outside of the facility?
  - Physical therapy
  - Speech therapy
  - Occupational therapy
  - Mental health services
  - Respiratory therapy
- Do licensed professionals provide these services?
  - How frequently do they visit?

Activities
- What activities are offered?
- Does the nursing home have the support of community volunteers?
- Does the nursing home offer field trips?
- Is the nursing home conveniently located so that family and friends can visit?

Lifestyle and Person-Centered Care
Person-centered care is a philosophy that empowers individuals to be active participants in their own care. It respects and values the individual while understanding the perspective of the person in all care planning and activity.
- Does the nursing home accommodate “early birds” and “night owls”?
- Will the nursing home meet your food preferences within your prescribed diet?
- What meal alternatives are offered?

The Quality of Care and Quality of Life
- Is the staff pleasant and responsive?
- Are residents treated with dignity and respect?
- Are residents well groomed and neatly dressed?
- Are call lights/devices promptly answered?
- Are residents out of their rooms and engaged in conversation or other activities, if able?
- Is the activities room in use?
- Do you see any evidence of physical and chemical restraints?
- Are meals attractively served?
- Are residents who need help with eating given prompt and courteous assistance?
- Are there options for special dietary needs?
TALK WITH RESIDENTS

Some questions to ask:

- Does someone come to help you soon after you ring your call light/device?
- Do you feel that your personal property is safe?
- Can you request your favorite foods? In general, do you enjoy your meals?
  - Can you chose with whom you eat? Does the staff help you if you need it?
- Does the nursing home involve you in decisions about your care?
- Do you have privacy when you want it?
- Do you have a choice about when you get up in the morning and go to bed at night?
- Are there interesting activities scheduled? What are they?
- Who is the Director of Nursing (DON)? How often do you see the DON?
- Who is the Administrator? How often do you visit with the Administrator?
- Is there a Residents' Council?
  - What does it do? Does the nursing home respond to its concerns?

TALK WITH RESIDENTS

FAMILIES AND FRIENDS

Families and friends of residents are often a very good source of information about the quality of care and services. If possible, arrange a meeting with other family members away from the facility.

Some questions to ask:

- Are you satisfied in general with the quality of care your relative or friend is receiving?
- What do you like or dislike about the facility?
- Whom do you go to with problems or complaints?
  - What happens? Do you feel comfortable about expressing your concerns?
- Is there a Family Council?
  - Is it active? What do they do? Does the nursing home respond to their concerns?
- What changes would you make if you could?
- Are you notified promptly of any accidents or any changes in your family member's condition?
- Does the nursing home involve you in decisions about care?
TALK WITH THE ADMINISTRATOR

Depending upon your needs, either physical or financial, you may qualify for Medicare or Medicaid.

- Is the facility certified for Medicare? Medicaid?
- Does the home currently have an opening?
  - If not, do they keep a first-come, first-served waiting list?
- Ask the Administrator to review and explain the admission contract in detail.
- How will you use my Living Will or Medical Power of Attorney?
  - How will you involve my agent in the decision-making process if I cannot make my own decisions? (It is a good idea to show these signed documents, if you have them, to the administrator.)
- If I refuse a treatment or if I refuse to eat, will you comply with my decision?
- How long will you hold a resident’s bed during a hospital stay?
  - If the resident is private pay, what is the payment rate for holding the bed?
- How are residents taken to the doctor or dentist?
  - Is there a charge for that service?
  - Note: For Medicaid residents there should be no extra charge.
- How do you resolve problems or complaints?
- How are roommates selected?
  - If roommates prove to be incompatible, can they be changed? How quickly?
- How long have you been the administrator?
- How many of your current nursing staff have been with you for 2 to 5 years?
- Do you have a full time licensed Social Worker?
- Do you have a full time Activities Director?
- What supplies and services are included in the basic daily rate?
  - What supplies or services are charged above the daily rate? Request a written schedule of charges.
- What is your refund policy if the resident leaves or is discharged during the middle of the month?
- What procedures do you follow when a resident’s property is lost or stolen?
- What procedures do you follow to prevent theft?
- How do you account for property when a resident dies?
TALK WITH THE DIRECTOR OF NURSING

If a resident has special care needs, such as memory care, treatment of bed sores, or incontinence, ask the Director of Nursing to tell you specifically how the staff manages them.

- Are residents and their families invited to care plan meetings? Do most of them participate?
- How do you manage difficult behavior?
- Are rehabilitation therapists active in care planning?
  - Are aides trained to carry out daily rehabilitation programs?
- Who participates in care plan meetings?

About Staffing

- Is the nursing home staffed on-site with at least one RN or LPN on every shift?
- Are your aides fully trained before you hire them?
- How many nurses are on duty today?
  - How many this evening? And tonight? For how many residents?

About Complaints

- How would you deal with a complaint about an abusive staff member?
  - An incompetent aide? A resident who bothers other residents?
- Can you give me an example of how you handled a recent complaint?
- When was the last time you had a request from the family council or resident council to fix a problem?
  - How did you respond? Were they satisfied?
- What is your policy for notifying the family when a resident’s condition changes?
- What are your procedures in the event of a resident's death?

OBSERVE THE ENVIRONMENT

Whenever possible, you should visit at various times of the day and on weekends to see if there is any difference.

- Are walls, floors, bedside tables, wheelchairs, and other equipment and furniture clean?
- Is the air fresh and without an odor?
- Are the halls well lit and spacious?
- Do rooms have enough windows?
- Do rooms have adequate space for clothing, personal belongings and visitors?
- Are residents' light switches and call lights/devices easy to reach?
- Is the dining room large enough to allow easy movement for walkers and wheelchairs?
- Is there enough space for a variety of resident activities and therapy?
- Is there a room where residents and visitors can have privacy?
- Are bathrooms easy to get into and are they equipped with safety devices?
LOOK AT THE INSPECTION REPORTS

The inspection report shows the state’s findings of “deficiencies” when it surveyed the home. Deficiencies are violations of nursing home regulations. They can be anything from minor lapses to life-threatening problems.

A few nursing homes each year come through the survey with no deficiencies at all. When that happens, the survey report will say so, and that is, of course, a good sign.

When you are visiting nursing homes, you can request to see the most recent inspection report. It must be readily available to the general public, without the need to ask for help from a staff member. A nursing home cannot keep it, for example, in the administrator’s office or the nursing station.

If you can’t find this report, look for a notice in the public areas of the nursing home that will tell you exactly where it may be found. Nursing homes are required to post such a notice. You may also get your own copy of the inspection report from the nursing home for a reasonable copying charge.

Kansas Advocates for Better Care (KABC) provides information about all Kansas licensed long-term care facilities.

The County Comparison report provides summary information on all adult care homes in a county. The detailed Consumer Information Report (CIR) includes such information as: the home’s size, staffing ratios, records of fines and penalties, occupancy rates, special services and more. You may order reports at no cost for any Kansas county, and any licensed adult care home from:

Kansas Advocates for Better Care
536 Fireside Ct., Suite B
Lawrence, KS 66049
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LOOK AT THE INSPECTION REPORTS

The Kansas Department for Aging & Disability Services (KDADS) also offers inspection reports. To request inspection reports through KDADS, call (800) 432-3535 (there is a charge for copying). Reports are also available from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) website: www.medicare.gov/nhcompare/home.asp

A nursing facility's plan of correction (POC) is available through KDADS and the CMS CareCompare website. A POC is a written report the nursing facility prepares showing how it will address the deficient standard(s) identified in law. There are several factors that cause delays in the posting and updating of a nursing facility's POC.

You may want to look at the nursing home's history over a period of several years if you are concerned about problems in the home. KABC provides inspection reports at no cost. KDADS will charge a fee for copies of inspection reports.

The following are some of the problems you might read about in the survey if a home is not meeting standards. Some items are more serious than others.

Some examples of serious problems in a survey include:
- Improper use of physical restraints; for example, vest or wrist restraints
- Overuse of psychotropic drugs; for example, Haldol, Thorazine or Seroquel
- Inadequate skin care causing bed sores
- Poor care of incontinent residents
- Unexplained weight loss
- Unusual decrease in activity levels
- Abuse, neglect or exploitation of residents.

There are three general types of inspection surveys:

- **An annual health survey.**
  - This is the survey all that nursing homes must have (State & Federal law requires inspections occur every 12 months on average.)
- **A revisit or a follow-up survey.**
  - This means that the surveyors inspected the home once, found problems, and had to come back to make sure the problems were corrected.
- **A complaint (abbreviated) survey.**
  - This is a survey in response to a specific complaint. Results of any survey is available to the public by request from KABC or online through KDADS.
About Kansas Advocates for Better Care

Founded in 1975 as Kansans for Improvement of Nursing Homes, the mission continues to be "improving the quality of long-term care for older Kansans, at home and in residential care settings."

KABC is a 501 (C) (3) non-profit organization, funded by members, contributors and grants for special purposes.

If you have questions about any of the information in the publication, for guidance about a licensed care home problem, or to order consumer reports, call toll-free:

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