

You should LOVE where you LIVE.

How can you measure quality of care in a nursing facility?

When choosing a nursing home, you should use the same process you would use in making other important decisions such as choosing higher education for yourself or your children. When evaluating the quality of colleges, families do not rely solely on a single set of test scores or published rankings, because numbers do not paint the entire picture of quality. The same is true when selecting a nursing home.

First – Ask around

- ✓ What kind of reputation for care does the nursing center have?
- ✓ What do doctors, clergy and other families think of the facility?

Second – Visit the facility

- ✓ Is it clean, pleasant and inviting?
- ✓ Are there strong, pervasive odors?
- ✓ Does the staff make you feel welcome?
- ✓ How does staff interact with residents and respond to their needs?
- ✓ Do the residents appear well cared for?
- ✓ Drop by over lunch or dinner.
- ✓ Talk with one of the family members.

Third – Ask the Admissions Director or Administrator about quality measures

- ✓ Ask to see their most recent Department of Health survey. If there were issues, have they been corrected?
- ✓ Do they use customer satisfaction surveys? In what areas do they excel? In what areas are they working to improve?
- ✓ Do they have an active Quality Improvement Team?
- ✓ Are they active in state and national long term care associations which provided educational programs and research designed to improve quality of care.
- ✓ Does their organization participate in an accreditation process?

Fourth – Talk to the Admissions Director or Administrator about the percentage scores from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Nursing Home Quality Initiative which appear on the CMS web site.

The Nursing Home Quality Initiative is a new, national emphasis on quality improvement in nursing homes that compares nursing homes in areas such as pain management, pressure ulcers and use of restraints that are generally associated with quality of care.

The intent of the initiative is two-fold. First, to help consumers by providing a starting point for asking further questions about a nursing home's quality of care. And, second, to work with nursing homes to ensure residents get the best possible care. The areas which are rated are listed below:

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- ✓ CMS has a score relating to “Loss of Ability in Basic Daily Tasks.” Most residents value being able to take care of themselves and some will lose their ability to do that even though the staff provides good care.

Ask how the staff will help your loved one stay as independent as possible for as long as possible. Also ask how you can be involved in that effort.

- ✓ CMS has a score relating to “Percentage of Residents with Pain”. A facility that does a better job of checking residents for pain may have a higher score in this area. This measure was developed to get you to talk to the nursing staff about how they check and manage pain.

So, if your loved one is dealing with pain, ask about how it will be managed.

- ✓ CMS has a score relating to “Percentage of Residents with Pressure (bed) Sores”. A pressure sore is a skin wound. They usually develop on bony parts of the body such as the tailbone, hip, ankle or heel and, in many cases, already exist when the resident is admitted to the facility. As a result, some of the pressure sores included in the score may be ones that are in the process of being successfully treated and improving.

Ask what the staff does to prevent or treat pressure sores, such as changing the resident’s position, improving nutrition and using soft padding to reduce pressure on the skin.

- ✓ CMS has a score relating to “Residents in Physical Restraints”. A physical restraint is any device, material or equipment that keeps a resident from moving freely. Examples include special types of vests, chairs with lap trays, ankle restraints, or wrist restraints. Only a doctor can order a restraint and restraints should be used only when they are necessary as part of the treatment of a resident’s medical condition.

Ask what the staff does to work with physicians to minimize the use of restraints.

- ✓ CMS has a score relating to “Residents with Infections”. Examples of infection are pneumonia, wound infections, and urinary tract or bladder infections. The national average for this score cannot be provided because of state-to-state differences in data collection.

Ask what the staff does to prevent infections, such as flu or pneumonia shots.

- ✓ CMS has a score relating to “Residents Who Walk as Well or Better”. Improved walking is an increase in a person’s ability to walk with little or no help. Residents who stay in a nursing home for a short time are generally expected to maintain or improve their ability to walk unless they are paralyzed, receiving hospice care or are paralyzed.

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Ask about how residents are encouraged to walk such as taking part in physical activities or participating in therapy or a restorative program.

- ✓ CMS has a score relating to “Residents with Delirium”. Delirium is a mix of short-term problems with focusing or shifting attention, being confused, or not being aware of one’s surroundings. Delirium is not “dementia” or “senility” which is more about learning and memory problems. Residents with delirium may need their medication or diet changed.

When choosing a nursing home, it is important to recognize that there is always room for improvement at any facility. Take time to ascertain if the staff takes pride in the care and services they provide, ask questions and stay involved.