

A Perfect Cause COMPREHENSIVE NURSING HOME CHECKLIST



WELCOME

You are embarking on a major life decision, placing a loved one or yourself into a nursing home.

Before making this decision, have you exhausted all other resources?

- Family and Respite Care
- Home Health
- Residential Care
- Adult Day Care Center
- Hospice Care
- Assisted Living Facility

Remember, no nursing home is perfect. Some are much better than others. We believe that 35,000 nursing home residents are dying each year due to abuse and neglect, in the United States.

With this in mind, it is important to consider all of the options, as well as conducting a thorough investigation of each nursing home on your list.

While this information is extensive, your diligence now will benefit your loved one and your family beyond measure.

The following Comprehensive Nursing Home Checklist will help you through this selection process.

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INTRODUCTION

This will be one of the most important decisions of your life. The more that you put into this stage of the process, the more you will benefit later. The uninformed choice can result in hours, weeks, months and even years of stress and anguish to a lifetime of guilt and remorse. An informed decision can provide you and your loved one with the quality care and dignity that is well deserved.

Carefully consider your loved one's needs, their preferences, and how they will pay for these services.

To begin, conduct some basic research. Much can be performed online, over the phone and in some cases by visiting your state's regulatory offices. Be sure to select at least three facilities to visit, after you complete your initial inquiries.

When you are ready to visit the facility, call and schedule an appointment with the administrator. When you arrive at the nursing home, interview the administrator before touring the facility.

When you tour the facility, be sure to see the entire facility. Be thorough. Treat this experience the same way that you would, if you were buying a house. In fact, it is likely that your insurance, Medicaid, or you will be paying considerably more than your house payment.

Appearances can be deceptive. Nicely decorated lobbies, dining areas, or single wings may only be a façade. Some of the most beautiful nursing homes can provide the worst care. While some of the older, less fancy homes may provide a much higher level of care.

How does the staff care for and treat their residents? Interview staff, residents, and families.

As you inspect each facility, make notes of your observations. Don't wait until after you leave the facility. Review and edit your notes in the car, before you leave the parking lot. Then review your findings for all three nursing homes.

Next, make surprise visits. It is best to conduct these inspections in the evenings. If at all possible, conduct them on the weekend at mealtime. Highlight questions or concerns about issues that you noted in your first visit and review. Make a second set of notes and review them as you did before.

Every nursing home has its strengths and its weaknesses. Which one best matches the needs for your loved one?

Very important, the closest nursing home is not always the best nursing home for your loved one. Yes, it is very important to visit your loved one and to visit frequently. However, no matter how close you live to your loved one, you cannot be there 24 hours a day, 365 days a year - so it is critically important that your loved one is in a safe place, best suited to care for their needs.

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BEFORE GOING TO THE NURSING HOME

HOW WILL YOU PAY FOR THESE SERVICES?

- Private Pay
- Insurance
- Medicaid
- Medicare
- Other

SPECIAL NEEDS

- Why does your loved one require a nursing home?
- What special health and / or mental conditions do they have?
- Do you want a private or semi-private room?
- Do you need any special equipment, medical devices, or services - i.e. therapy, nutrition?
- Who are the other family members who will be involved?
- What are their concerns and issues?
- What will they do to help in this selection process?
- What will they do after your loved one moves to the nursing home?

RESEARCH BEFORE GOING TO THE NURSING HOME

Access A Perfect Cause's website

- See what information is available for these nursing homes.
i.e. DHS Adult Protective Services – Long Term Care Investigation findings, News Articles, Rankings, Survey and Complaint Information, Nursing Home Forum

Access the Medicare.gov - Nursing Home Compare website

- Go to www.Medicare.gov, then select Nursing Home Compare

Speak with the state ombudsman's office:

1. Ask for a history of complaints for these facilities.
2. Ask to speak with the ombudsman supervisor for each facility.
3. Ask the supervisor for any information they can provide.
4. Would the supervisor place their loved one in this facility?

Contact your loved one's physician.

1. Does the physician have any experience with this nursing home?
2. If so, what can they tell you about the facility?
3. Can they recommend any other nursing homes?
4. Will the physician come to visit the resident in the facility?
5. Or does the resident need to be transported to their office / hospital?
6. How often will the physician see your loved one?
7. It should be at least once every 30 days for the first three months
8. Do you need a different physician?
9. The nursing home's Medical Director may not be your best choice!

Who's best interest is the Medical Director serving?

If he / she becomes your primary physician, could there be conflicts of interest?

Go to the regulatory agency and look at the files for the nursing homes you will visit. In the case of Oklahoma, go to the State Department of Health in Oklahoma City.

www.APerfectCause.org

America's Disability & Elder Rights Advocates

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BEFORE GOING TO THE NURSING HOME

FIRST CALL TO NURSING HOME AND PHONE INTERVIEW

Call the nursing homes to schedule an appointment with the:

- Administrator
- Director of Nursing
- Food Services Manager / Dietician
- Activities / Social Services Director

PRE-VISIT PHONE INTERVIEW

1. Screen for Predators in the Nursing Home
 - Do you have any sex offenders as residents in this facility?
 - Will you allow sex offenders as residents in the future?
 - Do you have any prison inmates or parolees as residents in this facility?
 - Will you allow prison inmates or parolees as residents in the future?
 - Do you have any jail inmates as residents in this facility?
 - Will you allow jail inmates as residents in the future?
 - Do you have any violent offenders found incompetent to stand trial as residents in this facility?
 - Will you allow violent offenders found incompetent to stand trial as residents in the future?
 - Do you have any previously convicted violent offenders as residents in this facility?
 - Will you allow any previously convicted violent offenders as residents in the future?
 - If yes to any of the above, what special training and security have you implemented to care for these offenders and to safeguard other residents?
 - If you do admit them in the future, will you notify residents, families, and visitors?
 - If so, how will you notify residents, families, and visitors?
 - Has the facility experienced any rapes, sexual assaults, or physical assaults on residents in the last two years, by other residents, staff or outsiders?
 - If so, ask them to explain.
2. Advise administrator why you need a nursing home for your loved one.
3. Advise them of your loved one's special needs.
4. Ask them, what they can offer to serve these needs? This is important!!! Do not ask them if they can... Often the answer will be a simple, "yes." Ask them, what they can offer to serve these needs. You are looking for specific answers to this extremely important question!
5. Tell them if you are looking for a private or semi-private room.
6. Tell them about any special equipment, devices, or services your loved one requires.
7. Ask for the nursing home's rates and any other fees for service.
8. Do they accept your proposed method of payment?
9. What is their availability for the room and services that you require?

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INITIAL NURSING HOME VISIT

Be sure the Director of Nursing, Dietician, and Activities Director are present to meet with the Administrator and you. If they cannot be present for the entire interview, then be sure they are with the Administrator and you when you do interview them.

REVIEW THESE ITEMS

Even though you discussed many of these items over the phone already, repeat the step - you have more people in the room and you can see if you are receiving the same or different answers.

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 - If so, ask them to explain.
2. Advise why you need a nursing home for your loved one.
3. Advise about your loved one's special needs.
4. Tell them if you are looking for a private or semi-private room.
5. Tell them about any special equipment, devices, or services you require.
6. Ask, what they offer to serve these needs? Again, ask them, what they offer to serve these needs? You are looking for specific answers to this extremely important question!
7. Ask for the nursing home's rates and any other fees for service.
8. Do they accept your proposed method of payment?
9. What is their billing procedure?
10. What is their availability for the room and services that you require?

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COMPREHENSIVE NURSING HOME CHECKLIST



NURSING HOME VISIT

ANNUAL SURVEYS & COMPLAINT INVESTIGATIONS

1. Ask for a copy of most recent annual survey.
2. Ask for an explanation of the cited deficiencies.
3. What measures were taken to correct the deficiencies?
4. Ask for a copy of all complaint investigations for the last two years, by all regulatory agencies. For example, in Oklahoma - State Department of Health and DHS Adult Protective Services, Long-Term Care Investigations.

MEDICAL DIRECTOR

1. Who is the nursing home's Medical Director?
2. How often does the Medical Director visit each resident?
3. How often does the Medical Director review each resident's file?
4. Will the Medical Director see your loved one, if the primary physician is unavailable?

STAFFING IN THE NURSING HOME

1. What are the levels of staffing or ratios?
2. How many residents are in the nursing home?
3. What is the staffing by shift / by position during the week: Days - Evenings - Nights
 - RNs
 - LPNs
 - CMAs
 - CNAs
4. What is the staffing by shift / by position on weekends: Days - Evenings - Nights
 - RNs
 - LPNs
 - CMAs
 - CNAs
5. What is the length of shifts by nursing staff, including aides?
6. Does the facility assign the same aides and nurses to your loved one?
7. What special training does the staff have to provide for your loved one's needs?
8. Does the facility use nurses and aides from registries or temp agencies?
9. If so, how often?
10. How do these temporaries know about your loved one's needs?
11. What steps are taken to prevent:
 - Rapes
 - Sexual Assaults
 - Physical Assaults
 - Dehydration?
 - Malnutrition?
 - Bedsores / Pressure Sores (Decubitus Ulcers)?
 - Urinary Tract Infections?
 - Fecal Impactions?
 - Falls?

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INITIAL NURSING HOME VISIT

MEDICATIONS

1. Who pulls and distributes medications?
2. What is their level of training?
3. Who is responsible for reviewing allergies, contraindications, and reactions to medications?
4. What steps are taken to resolve resident behavior before resorting to drug therapy?
5. If you choose to provide medications from your pharmacy, will the facility secure medications if you are unavailable or cannot secure them in emergencies?
6. What is the facility's medication error rate in the last annual survey and / or investigation?

TRANSFERS & TRANSPORTATION

1. Is it the facility's policy to have transfers by two staff members?
 - i.e. from bed to wheelchair, wheelchair to toilet, etc.
2. How is transportation provided to take your loved one to the doctor? Therapy? Hospital?

NOTIFICATION & CHANGE OF CONDITION

1. Who will be contacted when there are problems?
2. How soon will the staff contact you, if there is a change in condition?
3. How often does staff perform complete checks for skin tears, skin breakdown, etc.?
4. What hospital is used in emergencies?

BATHING & GROOMING

1. Do residents have a choice between a shower or bath?
2. How frequently will they be bathed?
3. What time of day will they be bathed?
4. When will the staff get your loved one up for breakfast?
5. When will the staff prepare your loved one for bed?
6. When is grooming performed? (i.e. teeth brushed, nails trimmed, etc.)
7. How is personal laundry handled?

DIETARY SERVICES & NUTRITION

1. Is there a professional dietician on staff?
2. Who plans the meals?
3. Review any special dietary needs for your loved one.
4. How will the staff provide for these needs?
5. What provisions are made for patients who are unable to eat in the dining room?
6. When are meals served?
7. What is the facility's unplanned weight gain / loss rate?
8. Ask to see menus, prepared food, stored food and the kitchen before you leave.

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INITIAL NURSING HOME VISIT

THERAPY SERVICES

1. What therapy services are provided?
2. Are there therapists on staff or does the facility contract out for therapy?
3. Who are the therapists?
4. Are the therapists licensed?
5. What is their level of training?
6. What therapy services will your loved one receive?
7. How often will your loved one receive therapy?

ALZHEIMER'S UNIT - (IF REQUIRED)

1. What makes the Alzheimer's unit different from the rest of the facility?

ACTIVITIES

1. Is there a licensed Social Worker on staff? Full time?
2. Is there an Activity Director on staff? Full time?
3. Who coordinates the activities?
4. Are activity calendars posted? If not, ask for a description of the activity program.
5. What activities are provided?
6. Do the activities cover a broad range of interests?
7. Are there off-site excursions? If so, what arrangements are required?
8. Are activities tailored to individual preferences?
9. What activities are available to residents confined to their rooms?
10. Do volunteers visit the facility?
11. What arrangements are made for residents to participate in religious services of their choice?
12. What is done for holidays and birthdays?

CARE PLAN

1. Ask for a description of the Care Plan.
2. How it is used?
3. When is it developed?
4. What input do you have in its development?
5. How often are Care Plan Meetings held?
6. Can they be scheduled at convenient times so you can participate?
7. How will you be notified?

FAMILY & RESIDENT COUNCILS - REFERENCES

1. Is there a Family Council?
2. What does the Family Council do?
3. When does it meet?
4. Who are the officers?
5. Ask for the officers' contact information - i.e. phone numbers - and - call them later
6. Is there a Resident Council?
7. When does it meet?
8. What is the Resident Council's function?

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INITIAL NURSING HOME VISIT

OWNERSHIP & MANAGEMENT

1. Who owns the nursing home?
 - Company - Corporation / Partnership / Sole Proprietorship
 - Who are the - Corporate Officers / Partners / Proprietors?
2. Is there a different company that manages the nursing home? Yes / No
 - If so, who manages the nursing home?
 - Company - Corporation / Partnership / Sole Proprietorship
 - Who are the - Corporate Officers / Partners / Proprietors?
3. How often are the owners on site?
4. How often are the managers on site?
5. How long has the facility been operating under the present management?
6. Are there any plans to change in the near future?
7. Does the nursing home carry liability insurance?
 - If there is a separate management company, does the management company carry liability insurance?
8. What other services do these companies and / or individuals provide to the facility and / or its residents?
 - Equipment and Supplies
 - Food Services
 - Hospice Services
 - Physical Therapy
 - Pharmaceutical Supplies
 - Other? _____
9. Does the facility support families' use of video monitoring for the resident and their belongings?

POLICIES & ADMISSIONS AGREEMENT

1. If applicable, ask about the facility's Do Not Resuscitate and / or Advance Directive Policies.
2. What is their "informed consent" policy?
3. When can family members review and copy your loved one's medical records?
4. How are care issues and / or complaints resolved?
5. What is the nursing home's policy for responding to residents and families' complaints?
6. What personal items have been stolen in the past?
7. Does the facility report theft of personal property to law enforcement?
8. What provisions has the facility made to prevent theft of personal property?
9. Ask for a copy of the admissions agreement - which you can take with you to review.
10. Ask the Administrator to review the admissions agreement with you.
11. Is there any mediation and / or arbitration language in the admission's agreement?
12. Does the facility demand a "responsible party" signature?
13. Ask for three references - and - call these references later
14. Ask for an information packet.
15. Now ask to tour the facility.

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FACILITY TOUR - (Use this for both Initial and Unannounced Visits)

RESIDENT APPEARANCE

1. Are residents up and dressed?
2. Are residents well groomed?
 - i.e. shaved, clothes clean, hair combed, nails trimmed and clean
3. Do residents appear alert, content and occupied?
4. Are residents involved in activities?
5. What activities are they involved in?
6. Ask to see the posted activity schedule?
7. Are residents participating in the scheduled activity?
8. Are the scheduled activities of interest for your loved one?
9. If your loved one prefers other activities, ask the activities person about scheduling these activities, before you leave
10. Are residents "parked" in wheelchairs at the nurse's station or in the hallways?
11. Are residents lethargic, listless or stuporous?
12. Are residents comfortably positioned in comfortable chairs?
13. Are residents restrained in their chairs or beds?
14. Are residents secured in chairs with trays or "lap buddies?"

STAFF OBSERVATIONS

1. Is there adequate staff?
2. Is the staffing schedule posted?
3. If so, where?
4. How many staff members are on break, outside smoking, or not working?
5. Does staff wear nametags and are their titles clearly visible?
6. Are call bells or call lights responded to in a timely manner (5 minutes or so)?
7. Are resident's requests responded to in a timely manner?
8. Does the staff ignore calls or cries for help?
9. Is the staff courteous to residents?
10. Does the staff treat residents with dignity and respect?
11. Is the staff condescending to residents or family members?
12. Are childish or otherwise inappropriate nicknames used when speaking with residents?
13. Does staff talk about residents as if they were not present or as if they were children?
14. Do the Administrator; Manager and Director of Nurses appear to know the residents?
15. Is privacy respected?
 - i.e. knocking on doors before entering rooms, keeping privacy curtains drawn while care is being given

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FACILITY TOUR - (Use this for both Initial and Unannounced Visits)

FACILITY ENVIRONMENT

Strong urine and body odors may indicate poor nursing care or poor housekeeping. Heavy "air freshener", deodorants, and other temporary chemical cover-ups may be substitutes for conscientious care and maintenance.

1. Are there obvious odors in the facility?
2. Do you see food, trash or linens on the floor?
3. Are the hallways and main areas well lit and free of hazards?
4. Is there adequate linen?
5. Are floors clean and non-slippery?
6. Ask to see the whirlpool.
7. Ask to see the showers and / or baths?
8. Ask to see the therapy rooms?
9. Does the facility allow smoking?
10. Are smoking areas directly ventilated outside?

HALLWAYS, STAIRS & LOUNGES

1. Are halls free of obstacles and debris?
2. Are stairways and exits clearly marked?
3. Are there handrails in all corridors?
4. Are fire extinguishers visible? Is there a disaster plan posted and does the facility have drills?
5. How many lounge areas are available for residents and visitors?
6. Are they clean and comfortably furnished?
7. Is there sufficient room for visiting?

SECURITY

1. Is there a system to protect wanderers?
2. Is it operational?
3. Are exterior doors alarmed?
4. Are exterior windows alarmed?
5. Ask for a demonstration.
6. Check doors at the end of hallways to see if they are secure.

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FACILITY TOUR - (Use this for both Initial and Unannounced Visits)

KITCHEN & DINING AREAS

1. Is the kitchen clean and well organized?
2. Is the food handled and stored in a safe and sanitary manner?
3. Is the dining area pleasant, clean and comfortable?
4. How many residents eat in the dining area?
5. Is it large enough to accommodate most of the residents?
6. Are there shifts for meals?
7. Do chairs fit under the table so that residents are comfortably close to their food?

MENUS & FOOD

Try to visit the facility during a meal. Observe the way the food is served, how residents are assisted with eating and what their reaction is to the food. You can probably buy a meal to sample the food.

1. Can you purchase a meal to sample?
2. Ask to see the posted menu for the week.
3. Ask to see the upcoming week's menu.
4. Is the food listed on the menu actually being served?
5. How often are meals repeated?
6. Are alternatives available - as required by law?
7. Does the food appear and smell appetizing?
8. Does it appear to be nutritious?
9. Do residents enjoy their food?
10. Are meals served at appropriate temperatures?
11. Ask a few residents what they think about the food.
12. Are dishes and silverware or disposable plates and utensils used?
13. Does staff assist residents who need help with their meals?
14. Are those residents receiving assistance, finishing their meals?
15. Are these residents eating at their own pace?

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COMPREHENSIVE NURSING HOME CHECKLIST



FACILITY TOUR - (Use this for both Initial and Unannounced Visits)

RESIDENT ROOMS

1. Which room(s) would be available for your loved one?
2. Ask to see the room.
3. Is this a private, semi-private or multiple-resident room, with three or four residents?
4. Is there a bedside stand, reading light, chest of drawers, and at least one comfortable chair for each resident?
5. Can your loved one bring their personal furniture?
6. Can your loved one decorate their room?
7. Can they have their own television, stereo, and / or radio?
8. Is there adequate storage space?
9. Is the storage separate from other roommates?
10. Are the beds easy to reach?
11. Will your loved one have doctor's orders for bedrails?
12. If so, are the bedrails split?
13. Are the bed rails padded?
14. Is there room to maneuver a wheelchair or Geri-chair easily?
15. Is there enough room for visitors?
16. Are call buttons accessible to residents?
17. Is there fresh drinking water at the bedside?
18. Is there an outside window?
19. If so, is the window secure and alarmed?
20. Can residents lock their doors when they are not present?

BATH & SHOWER ROOMS

1. Are bathrooms conveniently located?
2. How many residents share a bathroom?
3. Do bathrooms have handgrips or rails near all toilet and bathing areas?
4. Is there a call button near the toilet?