

chapter 3

## SELECTING A FACILITY

Most nursing home admissions happen under stress, often with the assistance of a hospital “discharge planner,” who is typically a social worker. Discharge planners usually have general information about nursing facilities near the hospital, but they normally don’t have time to learn about the actual quality of care in a given facility. If you are faced with the overwhelming task of finding the best nursing home for a loved one, where do you begin?

Although this is a job that no one wants, it can be done with forethought and confidence that the best decision was made for everyone involved. It is easier, and better for your loved one, if the first placement is to the best possible facility. Although a nursing home resident can be moved from one facility to another, this type of disruption can be very disturbing and is rarely in everyone’s best interest.

To get the best possible nursing home, the first step is for the family and/or potential resident to determine what is most important to them in looking for a facility. The resident’s needs and desires must be included in this evaluation. Variables such as location of the facility, whether a special care unit is available, and what types of payment sources are accepted should also be considered when beginning this process.

The next step is to identify the facilities in your area which meet the criteria you have established. The easiest place to start is in the back of this book. **Appendix A** (page 92) is a listing of all nursing homes in Virginia organized by region. If placement is not urgent, you can contact each nursing facility in your nearby area and ask for its information packet, which should include an activity calendar and a menu. You should also ask for the three most recent

## The Virginia Nursing Home Survival Guide

state annual inspection reports detailing the facility's major and minor deficiencies; nursing homes are required to make these reports available upon request. Virtually every nursing home will have some deficiencies; after all, working with extremely disabled and impaired persons is very difficult. Your local Area Agency on Aging should also have resources and helpful aids for assisting you in finding and comparing nursing homes. If you have Internet access, probably the most helpful of all resources is Medicare's Nursing Home Quality Compare Website at [www.medicare.gov/NHCompare](http://www.medicare.gov/NHCompare) — here, you can obtain detailed inspection information about each nursing facility that interests you, comparing various government-rated “quality measures” such as: *Percent of Residents Who Have Moderate to Severe Pain, Percent of High-Risk Residents Who Have Pressure Sores, Percent of Residents Who Were Physically Restrained, and Percent of Residents Who Spend Most of Their Time in Bed or in a Chair.* The NHCompare Web site also rates the care and services that each facility provides to its residents, and allows you to view how each facility stacks up in staffing hours for each type of health care worker against the Virginia and national averages. All of the above resources, including all Virginia Area Agencies on Aging and numerous other helpful resources, are listed in **Appendix B** (page 129) and **Appendix C** (page 134).

Step three is to tour those facilities you have identified in step two. Don't schedule your visits in advance. Just show up during regular business hours. You should be able to meet with an administrative staff member, who should be able to answer all your questions. You will also want to tour a second time, in the evening or on the weekend, to see if there is a drastic difference in the atmosphere of the facility or the care being provided. It is important to tour at least two facilities so you can see the difference in the physical plant and the staff.

## The Virginia Nursing Home Survival Guide

While you are touring the facility, pay attention to your gut feeling. Ask yourself:

- Do I feel welcome?
- How long did I have to wait to meet with someone?
- Did the admissions director ask about my family member's wants and needs?
- Is the facility clean?
- Are there any strong odors?
- Is the staff friendly?
- Do they seem to genuinely care for the residents?
- Do the staff seem to get along with each other?

Listen and observe. You can learn a lot just by watching and paying attention. And ask questions. You want to be sure that the facility is giving proactive care, not just reacting to crisis. Here are a few examples of the types of questions the staff should be able to answer:

- How do you ensure that call lights are answered promptly, regardless of your staffing?
- If my father is not able to move or turn himself, how do you ensure that he is turned and does not develop bedsores?
- How do you make sure that someone is assisted with the activities of daily living like dressing, toileting and transferring?
- Can residents bring in their own supplies?
- Can residents use any pharmacy they wish?

### **The Virginia Nursing Home Survival Guide**

- How many direct care staff members do you have on each shift? Does this number exceed the minimal number that state regulations require, or do you just meet the minimum standard?
- What sources of payment do you accept?
- How long has the medical director been with your facility?
- How were your last state survey results? (Get a copy.)
- How did you correct any deficiencies and what process did you put in place to make sure you do not make these mistakes again?
- Has the state prohibited this facility from accepting new residents at any time during the last 2 years?
- What is your policy on family care planning conferences? Will you adjust your schedule to make sure that I can attend the meeting?
- Do you have a list of references I can talk with?
- Can my loved one come in for a meal to see if he/she fits in and likes the facility?

Beginning on page 14, you will find a comprehensive Nursing Home Evaluation Tool you can use when touring facilities. This tool will help you keep track of which facility you like best. You should make a separate copy of the blank form for each facility you plan to visit.