

Nursing Home Checklist

By Sherry M. Lewis

- First Impression
 - Do you like the facility's location and outward appearance?
 - Is the facility convenient for frequent visits by family and friends?
 - Are you welcomed with a warm greeting from the staff?
 - Does the staff address residents by their names and interact with them during your tour?
 - Do you notice the residents socializing with each other and do they appear content?
 - Is the staff appropriately dressed, friendly and outgoing?
 - Do the staff members treat each other in a professional manner?
 - Are visits with the residents encouraged and welcome at any time?
 - What percentage of the rooms/beds is available?
 - Is there a waiting list? If so, how long do they estimate it will take to be admitted?
- Living Area and Accommodations
 - Is the floor plan well designed and easy to follow?
 - Are doorways, hallways and rooms accommodating to wheelchairs and walkers?
 - Are elevators available for those unable to use stairways and handrails to aid in walking?
 - Are floors of a non-skid material and carpets conducive for safe walking?
 - Does the residence have good lighting, sprinklers and clearly marked exits?
 - Is the residence clean, free of odors and appropriately heated/cooled?
 - What is the facility's means of security if a resident wanders?
 - Are the common areas in general attractive, comfortable and clean?
 - Is there an outside courtyard or patio for residents and visitors, and assistance getting there?
 - Does the residence provide ample security and is there an emergency evacuation plan?
 - Are private rooms available and/or double occupancy units for sharing with another person?

- Does residence have furnished/unfurnished rooms? What is provided or what can they bring?
- May they decorate their own rooms? Is there adequate storage space?
- Is a 24-hour emergency response system accessible from the unit?
- Are bathrooms private with handicapped accommodations for wheel-chairs and walkers?
- Do all units have a telephone and cable TV and how is billing handled?
- Moving In, Contracts, and Finances
 - What's involved with the moving in/out process? How is the initial needs assessment done?
 - Does assessment process include the resident, family, facility staff, along with the physician?
 - Is there a written plan for the care of each resident? Is there an ongoing process for assessing a resident's need for services and how often are those needs evaluated?
 - Is there a written statement available of the resident rights and responsibilities?
 - Is a contractual agreement available that clearly discloses healthcare, accommodations, personal care and supportive services, all fees, and admission and discharge provisions?
 - What type of insurance is required/accepted? Medicare/Medicaid/Medigap/Long-term care/Private?
 - What are the specific costs for various levels of care including skilled/unskilled beds?
 - What additional services and staff are available if the resident's needs change?
 - When may a contract be terminated and what are the policies for refunds and transfers? Is there an appeals process for dissatisfied residents?
 - What happens if funds are depleted and full payments can no longer be made?
 - Is there any government, private or corporate programs available to help cover the costs?
 - Is there a procedure to pay for additional services such as skilled nursing care when the services are needed on a temporary basis?

- Do billing, payment and credit policies seem fair and reasonable? May resident handle his/her own finances with staff assistance if able? Must a family member/outside party be designated?
- Health, Personal Care, Services
 - What type of healthcare and personal care services are available? Does the facility have both short and long-term services, such as routine physical and dental/vision examinations as well as skilled nursing?
 - Can the facility provide a list of available services and are residents and families involved in developing the care plan/service agreement? Who provides these services/what are their qualifications?
 - Are physical, occupational, or speech therapy services available on-site? Who coordinates these services and how are they billed to Medicare/Medicaid or other third party insurance?
 - Is staff available to provide 24-hour assistance with activities of daily living (ADLs) if needed?
 - Is staff available to assist residents who experience memory, orientation, or judgment losses?
 - How are medical emergencies handled? Does the residence have a clearly stated procedure for responding to medical emergencies? Is there an arrangement with a nearby hospital?
- Social and Recreational
 - What kinds of group/individual recreational activities are offered and who schedules them?
 - Is there an organized activities program with a posted daily schedule of events?
 - Do volunteers and family members come into the residence to participate/conduct programs?
 - Does the facility schedule trips or go to other events off premises?
 - Do residents participate in activities outside of the residence in the neighboring community?
 - Are the resident activity (social) areas appropriate and desirable to the prospective resident?
 - Are there supplies for social activities/hobbies (games, cards, crafts, computers, gardening)?
 - Are religious services held on the premises or arrangements made for nearby services?

- Are there fitness facilities, as well as regularly scheduled exercise classes?
- Does the residence create a sense of community by allowing residents to participate in certain activities or perform simple chores for the group as a whole?
- Does facility have pets? Who is responsible for their care?
- Staff
 - Are nursing staff members courteous and friendly to residents and to other staff?
 - Do nursing staff respond timely to residents requests for assistance such as help getting in and out of bed, dressing and going to the bathroom?
 - Which nursing staff members are involved in planning the resident's individual care? Are they the same ones who give the care to residents?
 - Ask questions about staff turnover. Is there frequent turnover among certified nursing assistants (CNAs)? What about turnover for nurses and supervisors, including the Director of Nursing and the Administrator?
 - What is the nursing staff to resident ratio? How many registered nurses (RNs) and Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) are on staff? How many per shift? What is their training/education?
 - What is the nursing assistant to resident ratio and how many are on staff? How many on each shift? What kind of training do certified nursing assistants (CNAs) receive?
 - What is history of compliance with staffing ratios? Are there incentives to help with staffing?
 - How does the nursing home ensure that all staff maintains licensure/certification, receives continuing education, and keeps their knowledge and skills up-to-date?
- Food
 - Does the residence provide three nutritionally balanced meals a day, seven days a week, and how does the menu vary from meal to meal?
 - Observe meal times. Do all residents who need assistance with eating get help? Does staff give each resident enough time to chew food thoroughly and complete the meal?
 - What about special diets; does a dietitian plan or approve menus? Are resident's weight routinely monitored?
 - Are residents involved in menu planning? Can request special foods? Are snacks available?

- Does dining room environment encourage residents to relax, socialize, and enjoy their food
- Are water pitchers/glasses accessible in rooms and does staff assist with drinking as needed?
- Are common dining areas available? Is tray service available when ill and staff to assist?
- May meals be provided at a time a resident would like or are there set times for meals?
- May residents have guests for meals in the dining room for an additional fee? Is there a private dining room for special events and occasions?
- License and Certification
 - Is the facility Medicare certified and/or Medicaid certified?
 - Is this a skilled nursing facility and is a skilled bed available?
 - Is the facility accepting new patients? Is there a waiting period for admission?
 - If the facility is sponsored by a nonprofit organization and managed under contract with a commercial firm, what are the conditions of that contract?
 - Is there a resident council or organization through which resident/family have a means of voicing their views on the management of the community?
 - Each state requires the residence to be licensed and/or certified. Does the facility have a current license/certification and is it displayed?
 - Each state requires the administrator to be licensed/certified. Does she/he have current license/certification?
 - What reputation does the facility have in the community? How long has it been in business? Is it in good financial health? Does the facility follow generally accepted accounting procedures?
 - Has the facility corrected any Quality of Care deficiencies in their State inspection report?