

ALZHEIMER'S / DEMENTIA

Choosing the right facility

Name of facility: _____

Address: _____

Phone number: _____

Date(s) of visit: _____

Contact: _____ Phone: _____

General rating on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent): 1 2 3 4 5

Introduction

Alzheimer's / Dementia facilities are specialized living arrangements for seniors with memory impairments that have progressed to the point where they can no longer communicate normally and/or take care of themselves. Besides a room and meals in a common dining area, these facilities provide constant supervision, formal nursing care plans, help with activities of daily living (ADLs), and personalized care designed to offer patients as much mental and memory stimulation as possible.

There are no special licensing requirements for a facility to call itself an Alzheimer's / Dementia unit. So, don't assume from the name alone that it will provide adequate care for your loved one. The only way to find out if the facility meets your needs is to visit it and know what to look for.

Some Alzheimer's / Dementia facilities are free-standing. However, many patients also require other services provided by nursing homes and assisted living facilities. As a result, many nursing homes and assisted living facilities include separate on-site Alzheimer's / Dementia units.

This checklist should be used along with the Assisted Living Facility Checklist or Nursing Home Checklist, depending upon the type of facility you are considering. Take the appropriate checklist along with this one when you tour each facility. Keep in mind that the staff's attitude and philosophy about caring for residents with Alzheimer's / Dementia should be reflected throughout the facility, from architectural design to nursing care plans, meal preparation and planned activities.

Facility

- Is the facility on a quiet or busy street? Urban or residential? *Quiet residential neighborhoods are preferable. They reduce the risk of wanderers being overwhelmed, hit by vehicles or victimized.*
- What is the noise level? Is the facility insulated to reduce noise? *A low noise level is best for Alzheimer's / Dementia patients because their senses are easily overloaded.*
- Is the Alzheimer's / Dementia unit physically separate from the rest of the facility? *Lucid patients and those with Alzheimer's / Dementia have different needs. Too much interaction between them can disturb both sets of residents.*

- Have adequate measures been taken to ensure that wanderers can't escape the unit or the grounds undetected? Are exit doors locked or do residents wear alarm-activating bracelets? If exit doors are locked, are adequate procedures in place to allow for orderly evacuation in case of emergency?
- Is the unit small and home-like ... or large and institutional? *Smaller, home-like units are preferable. Residents with Alzheimer's / Dementia become easily confused in institutional settings where everything looks the same.*
- Is the unit all on one level? *This is preferable for Alzheimer's / Dementia residents who are at greater risk of falling or becoming disoriented.*
- Are there circular areas designated for wanderers, or are the hallways long with dead ends? *Alzheimer's / Dementia residents often seem compelled to wander. Dead ends can make them agitated and frustrated.*
- Is light used as a cue to help residents know the time of day? *Bright lights should be used during daylight and low lights at night.*
- Are visual cues used to help residents orient themselves? *Cues include:*
 - **Color.** Patterns can confuse people with Alzheimer's / Dementia, so color schemes should be bold and simple. For example, all bathroom doors should be the same color and the hallway a single contrasting color.
 - **Locator signs.** Written words like "kitchen" or "toilet" may be used, but graphics are vital for patients who no longer read. Signs should be at eye level, in strong contrasting colors with a flat finish. Other signs can help orient residents by including information or graphics indicating the daily schedule, season or city.
 - **"Memory boxes."** These open containers display old photos and mementos to help residents identify their rooms. Alzheimer's and Dementia often impair short-term memory but leave long-term memory intact. Residents may not recognize themselves in the mirror but would recognize photos of themselves in their youth.
 - **Large clocks and calendars.** These help orient residents in time and can include, for example, information on the daily schedule and the season.

Staff and Services

- What is the staff-to-resident ratio? *The ratio should be about 1-to-4.*
- What is the difference in training for staff in the special care unit? Is an Alzheimer's / Dementia specialist on staff or available on a consulting basis?
- How do services in the special care unit differ from services in the rest of the facility? What special services are provided for residents with Alzheimer's / Dementia?
- How do you insure that patients get proper nutrition? Are finger foods available? Do you offer decaffeinated drinks throughout the day?

- If a resident shows _____ behavior, how would the staff react? (Examples: tearful, combative, accusatory, asking repetitive questions - whatever behavior your loved one tends to exhibit.)
- What is the facility's policy on restraints, both chemical and physical?
- If there will be a roommate, does he/she have habits or mannerisms that would be difficult for the prospective resident to handle, e.g. staying up late at night, yelling, going through personal possessions of others? What does the facility do when problems such as these arise?
- Are smaller, separate rooms designated for activities, as opposed to larger, communal spaces? *Residents can become disoriented in big rooms with multiple activities.*
- What activities are arranged for residents with memory impairment?
- Are residents encouraged to remain continent? Are they reminded to use the bathroom? Is a schedule in place?
- Does staff assist residents to the bathroom if needed?
- What percentage of residents wears diapers?

Final Notes and Comments

Comments: _____

What I liked most about this facility: _____

What I liked least: _____

Overall impressions: _____
