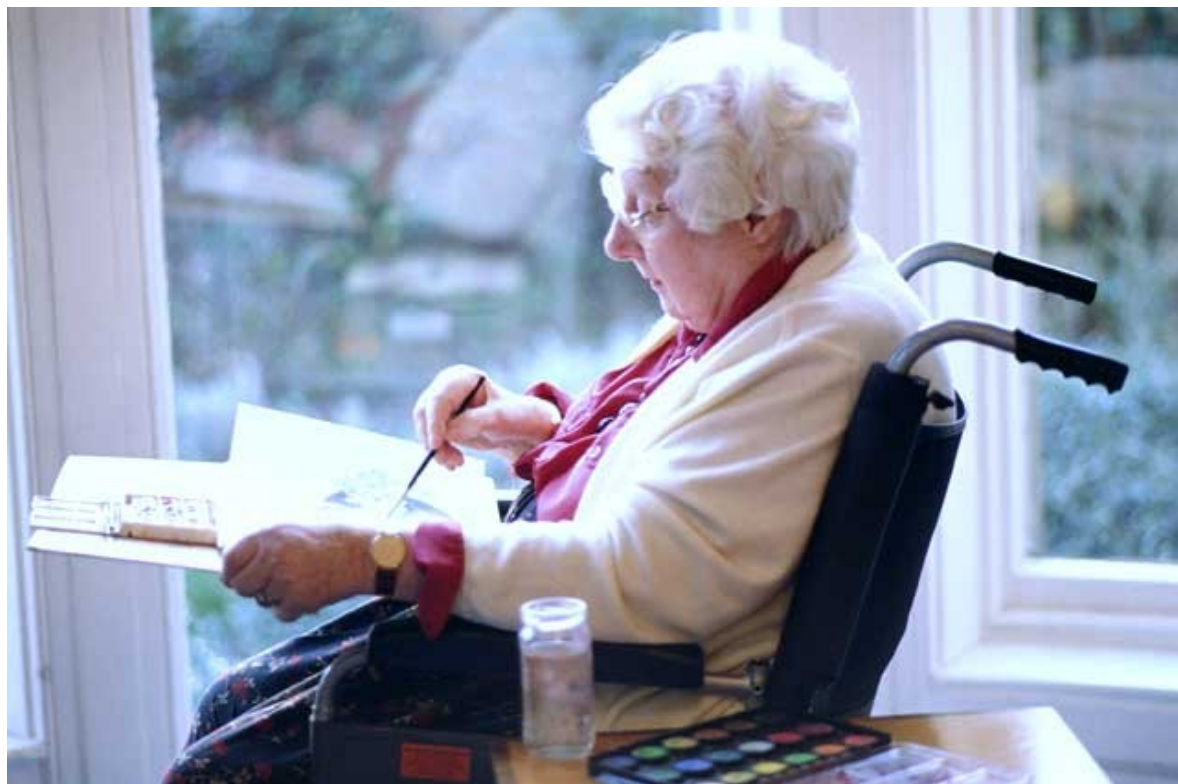


BEFORE THE DECISION: 5 HELPFUL HINTS FOR CHOOSING A NURSING HOME



TERRY LAW FIRM, LLC

13321 N. OUTER 40 ROAD, SUITE 800
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI 63017
TELEPHONE: (314) 878-9797
TOLL FREE: (888) 317-2525
WWW.NURSINGHOMEJUSTICE.COM

BEFORE THE DECISION: HELPFUL HINTS FOR CHOOSING A NURSING HOME FACILITY

Hopefully, you will never have to choose a nursing home facility for a loved one. However, more than likely, at some point in your life you will find yourself in the difficult position of having to decide what nursing home facility is the best fit for a parent or grand parent. Far too many people end up regretting their decision because they didn't know what to look for when choosing a nursing home. Here are 5 helpful hints to consider when making that difficult decision.

1 GO ONLINE. The internet is an excellent source of information on nursing home facilities. The most comprehensive internet site is **www.Medicare.gov**. Using this and other similar sites, you can compare nursing homes in your city, state and zip code.

Information is available on health inspections and staffing. Carefully review these sections as they provide important information about the quality of care provided by the facility and the staffing levels it maintains. Once you have determined which facilities may best suit your loved one, the next step is to personally visit the facility.

2 TOUR THE FACILITY. Touring a nursing home facility is critical when determining whether or not a facility is the best place for your loved one. Contact administrative staff and arrange for a guided facility tour. Make sure your tour guide allows you to view the kitchen, dining room, physical therapy room, resident rooms, shower rooms, and common areas. If you have to, insist that you be allowed to view every area accessible to facility residents. Some nursing homes will keep certain areas cleaner than other areas specifically for touring purposes. If facility staff refuses to allow you to tour the entire facility, you may want to keep looking. I also recommend "dropping in" and walking around. If no one offers to assist you, you have learned a valuable lesson about their security measures.

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ASK QUESTIONS. During your facility tour, ask questions—lots of questions. A few of the more important questions to ask are:

- How many residents live here?
- What is the facility's resident capacity?
- What time are residents woken up?
- What time are residents given their meals?
- What types of food are provided for residents?
- How often are residents seen by physicians?
- How many hands-on employees are there per resident?
- How often are residents bathed or showered?
- What type of background checks are done on employees?
- What is the employee turnover rate?
- Does the facility carry liability insurance?
- Who is my primary contact if I have complaints or concerns?

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USE YOUR SENSES. While asking questions is helpful during your tour, use your five senses as well. Trust your instincts.

SMELL. How does the facility smell? As you walk from area to area, make mental notes of how the areas smell. Do the front office and reception areas smell pleasant? Many nursing homes will keep public areas smelling nice and clean. But keep in mind, your family member won't be in the administrator's office! Pay attention to how the resident areas smell. In short-staffed nursing homes, residents are often lying in their own waste for long periods of time. Obviously, that will result in a lingering foul smell. If the facility smells good even in the patient areas, then you may very well be touring a facility whose staff are well-trained and fully engaged in caring for their residents. If the facility smells like urine or feces, the facility could be under-staffed and your loved one may suffer as a result.

SIGHT. Pay attention to residents in the hallways, bedrooms, and common rooms. How do they look? Are they properly dressed in matching clothes? Is their hair combed? Are they asking for assistance and receiving it? Are they in need of assistance and receiving it without asking?

Caring nursing home staff anticipate a resident's needs and timely provide them with needed assistance. If you see residents with food on their faces, spills on their clothes or wearing mismatched clothes, you may be touring a facility that has insufficient staffing, a poorly trained staff or people who just don't care. Look to see if staff members are congregating together rather than assisting residents. Is the building clean? Look for stains, bugs, mold, cobwebs, dried urine.

LISTEN. What do you hear? Do you hear residents asking for help? Is facility staff timely responding? Every nursing home is equipped with a call light system. Using this system, a resident can push a button in their room and trigger a call light indicating to facility staff that they are in need of assistance. Usually, once a resident presses the button in their room, a beeping sound is heard at the nursing station and a light flashes above the resident's door. Pay attention to how long it takes for facility staff to respond to the resident's request. It is not unusual for call lights to continue non-stop for over 30 minutes! The call light system is an easy way for you to determine if your loved one will receive timely care. Listen to how staff members talk to residents. Are they short and abrupt or calm and caring? Consider how you would want your family member talked to at the nursing home you choose.

TASTE. If possible, eat a meal at the facility. Amazingly, many nursing homes budget less than \$5.00 per day to feed a resident, making it virtually impossible to feed the residents good tasting, nutritious meals. If you are going to eat a meal at the facility, **don't make arrangements until you get there.** If you make prior arrangements to eat, the nursing home will make sure that you receive a higher quality meal than what is typically fed to residents. Remember, you want to experience what your loved one will experience on a daily basis, so when passing by the dining room, ask if you can have a resident meal — right then!

5 THE UNANNOUNCED VISIT. Now that you have officially toured the facility while facility staff was on their best behavior, it is time for stealth. Visit the facility, unannounced, and at an odd time. Walk around in the halls of the facility and see if anyone stops you or asks you the reason for your visit. Watch and see how many facility staff you actually see working. Are they regularly interacting with the residents? Are they doing their jobs or are they socializing with each other? Are they timely answering call lights? If not, how long does it take them? Can you even find a staff member. Remember, some nursing homes will make it known when a facility tour is underway. Staff members are told to look busy and be seen while the tour is underway. By visiting a second time unannounced, you will have the opportunity to see how the nursing home really operates and experience the reality your family member will experience on a daily basis.

There is never a guarantee that your family member won't suffer abuse or neglect at a nursing home. However, there are ways to weed out the poorly run nursing homes and reduce the likelihood of a negative event. We hope that these five helpful hints will assist you as you make one of the most difficult decisions of your life.

The **Terry Law Firm, LLC** provides a free consultation for individuals whose loved ones have suffered abuse or neglect while a nursing home resident. If you would like to talk to an attorney, please call the **Terry Law Firm, LLC** at 1-888-317-2525 or 314-878-9797. To learn more about nursing homes, please visit our website at www.NursingHomeJustice.com.

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