



Guidelines in your search for senior living options

As you begin the process of looking for senior living options, there is a lot to think about. Below are ideas to consider and suggestions for questions you should ask. These ideas and suggestions come from people who have been through the process and want to help you have a smooth transition.

Pre-visit planning

Who will assist you with the decision?

Talk about the move into senior living with the person you depend upon most.

Discuss things like:

- Why you believe it is time to move?
- What are your priorities as you decide to move.? What is the priority of your family member? Some people want safety, some want or need care, some want a nice environment. It is important to discuss these priorities.
- Which family member is helping you make the decision? When a decision needs to be made will this family member always be available? Are there other family or friends who would also be available if needed?

Discussions

Many medical decisions will need to be discussed and clarified prior to making a senior living care decision. Talk about these topics with those who have agreed to help you. These discussion should include the following:

- Your preferences regarding DNR (Do not resuscitate) and DNI (Do not intubate), and POLST (Physician's Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment).
- Make sure your medical wishes are clearly understood by those who will be involved with your decision.
- Talk to your family doctor about the idea of moving. Schedule a consultation and physical evaluation with your doctor before making a decision.
- Finally, make sure the person who has agreed to help you is aware of your desire to communicate via video cameras.

Gather documents

Before you begin your search, get organized. Make sure you have your legal documents all in one place where you can find them. This should include:

- Living Will or Health Care Directive
- Any documents stipulating your medical preferences such as a DNR (Do not resuscitate), DNI (Do not intubate), or POLST (Physician's Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment)
- Formalized Power of Attorney document
- Health Insurance information and cards

Write down names of key people

Make sure you have written down the following. Keep it where you can easily find it:

- Write down the name of the family member or a friend you want to help you with this decision.
- Write down the name of the person you have given your authority for power of attorney.
- Write down name of your health care agent and anyone else associated with your health care, such as doctors and therapists.

Put all of this contact information, including phone numbers and email addresses, where you can easily find it.

Cameras

Use of cameras in care facilities has become standard practice. Minnesota state law allows cameras in your care facility apartment or room.

Talk with the person helping you make the decision about a care location about your plan to use a camera as part of your care.

When considering a camera purchase a few options exist, and new technology is becoming available regularly. Here are two types of cameras currently available and pros and cons about their features:

Nest camera

- The Nest camera is not easy to hide because it uses cords and must be connected to a power source.
- This type of camera is good quality and produces clear video.
- With this camera a person can utilize a smart phone app to get alerts, view motion control settings, view footage and review motion activities for up to two weeks (technology is always changing so this may not be current)
- This type of phone requires a subscription which costs approximately \$200 a year.

Blink camera

- The Blink camera is a very portable camera option that is easy to hide.
- This camera uses batteries that last over a year.
- With this camera a person can utilize a smart phone app to access and view various settings, alerts, footage, etc.
- The Blink camera does not require a subscription.
- This camera can sometimes be purchased on sale, costing approximately \$150 – 200 for three little cameras.

When you visit

When you visit a senior care facility there is a lot to consider. **Most importantly**, do not be swayed by the beautiful facility and amenities. This is secondary to what you want to find. *What you want is good safe care.* **Secondly**, remember that those who give initial tours might not be health care professionals. **More often, tour guides are marketing or sales people who have worked in the hospitality business.** They may not be familiar with medical care. You may have to ask to speak to another professional who is trained in medical caregiving.

As you visit and compare senior care facilities, your considerations should include staffing, care planning, activities and emergency care.

Senior care staff

Care received within a facility is dependent upon the staff. Ask these important questions about staffing during your first visit.

- What is the name of the building's home care provider?
- Ask to see the latest home care survey by the Minnesota Department of Health.
- What is the aide/ resident ratio? (Be clear that you want to know the direct care staff ratio - not all "staff" ie food service, housekeeping, maintenance)
- Have all of the employees who work in the building had background checks (*cleared* not in progress)?
- How many aides work on each shift?
- Are aides required to do laundry or other tasks while caring for residents?
- How many aides on staff have completed the basic 8 hour training?
- What percent of their AIDE staff is full time? Part time? Casual?
- Are the aides allowed to work double shifts? Triple shifts?
- What is the backup plan when scheduled aides are unable to work their shift?
- Does this facility use temp agencies? Does the facility assure the temporary or agency aide has had a background check?
- Is there an RN in the building 24 hours a day , seven days a week?
- How many of the staff/aides have been employed at the facility for over two years? How many have been there less than three months?
- How long has the head nurse been at this facility?
- What sort of training do the aides and nursing staff receive? Computer or hands on? How many hours of training? Are the aides certified?
- Do the aides shadow another aide or nurse when newly hired? If so, who do they normally shadow?
- Does the facility do background checks of all staff before they are hired? Do all staff need to pass the background check before they are able to be on site, or can they begin working while background check is in process?
- Is there consistency in care givers? Ask for an explanation of what this means.
- Who picks up someone if they fall? Do aides assist, or is 911 called?
- Are residents charged if 911 is called?

Care planning

Senior care planning should begin with orientation and be followed by meetings with professional medical staff to discuss details about care options. Ask questions about this at your first visit. Here are some suggestions:

- What is their orientation plan for new residents and how long does it last?
- How is the senior care plan developed?
- How often is a family care planning meeting held?
- Who typically attends a family care planning meeting, besides family members?
- When a care plan changes, who typically initiates it? When changes are made, how are caregivers and aides informed? Is the family informed?
- Is there any policy to prevent residents and their families from talking about their care with other residents or their families?
- Do you have an active Family Council? Who runs it?

Activities

While activity options may not be the most important consideration in your decision, it is important to consider what will be available to you once you are settled into your new living situation. Here are some questions you might ask about activities available at the care facilities you visit:

- What type of activities are provided?
- Are there activities every day? Some facilities do not have weekend activities as they assume residents will have family visits.
- Is there a specific activity director or dedicated activities staff person and is that person full time at this specific facility, or do they travel from one facility to another?
- Ask to see a current activity calendar and calendars from several past months. Stop by at a later date for an activity you might be interested in to see what it is like and if it is actually taking place. (Many of us have experienced that these calendars have appeared “for show”— especially in the memory care areas and activities are often not provided).
- Is there a procedure that is used to contact a family member if a resident planned to attend an activity, but does not attend?

After a decision has been made

When a decision has been made for a senior care setting, family members of the person moving into this new setting should consider some of these ideas from people who have been through this process. And although it can be overwhelming, read all information you were given upon admission, including the “Resident Rights” documentation. This is the best way to know your rights.

A person moving into a senior care setting could be very confused during the first few days and weeks. This is often referred to it as “Sundowner’s syndrome.”

- Evenings are the most difficult and confusing time.
- To help with this transition, a family member should consider spending a night or two in the new setting.
- Consider purchasing a blow up bed; bring this bed and your own bedding, as you help your loved one during this transitional time.

Once a person has moved into a senior care setting, that person and that person’s family benefit from getting to know other residents and their families.

- Exchange contact information with members of other residents’ families.
- After you have made a relationship with other resident’s family members, share any concerns or observations.
- If you begin to see common themes or areas of concerns, speak up together, having more impact on the facility management as you address concerns together.

When you have concerns

Family members of a person moving into a new senior care setting should be thoughtful in dealing with their concerns about the care being given to their family member. Here are some suggestions about what to do if you have concerns:

- Care facilities are typically more fully staffed during standard business hours, so vary your visiting schedule. Go at odd times, during evenings, weekends, holidays, and holiday weekends.
- Make sure your family member’s care plan is updated and request a care conference if you have concerns that are not being handled as they should be.
- Put all concerns in writing. Use email to provide a clear record. Ask that a care plan be created to address your specific concern.
- Ask what a reasonable length of time is for the care plan to be fully implemented and document this when you follow up.
- Ask what to do if the care plan services are not delivered at the agreed upon time.
- If you raise a concern in person with a staff member, follow up with an e-mail to document that conversation and the activity or item of the care plan that was discussed during that conversation. When you document the conversation, write something like this:

Dear Nurse,

Thank you for talking with me this afternoon. Just so I am clear about what we discussed, we agreed to the following _____ to take place during this amount of time/before this date. If this care cannot be implemented within this time, we agreed that _____ I can be reached at (phone, or email) at _____.

- Continue to follow-up with staff member to be sure the care plan is followed.

We hope information presented here will be helpful as you look for senior living options. Finding good safe senior living locations is not a simple process, but by using a careful and thoughtful process, you can have a smooth transition.