50 Secrets a Nursing Home Won’t Tell You

What you need to know—but probably don’t—to ensure that your loved one is happy, cared for, and safe.

By Michelle Crouch from Reader’s Digest Magazine | April 2013

• How do you know it’s time to start looking at nursing homes for a loved one?

“If you have concerns about safety, about his being able to keep track of his medications, about whether he’s eating enough and eating healthfully, he’s probably ready to go. It gets to a point where you have to say, ‘This can’t go on any longer.’”—Richard L. Peck, former editor of Long-Term Living magazine and author of The Big Surprise: Caring for Mom and Dad

• “The best time to visit a nursing home you’re considering is 6 p.m. on a Saturday. Dinner has been served, few if any managers will be in the facility, and it’s likely that no marketing people will be there. You’ll get a true picture. Talk to staff and family members of residents about what they like and don’t like.”—A California nursing home administrator

• “Consider the noise level. Most nursing homes have double rooms, with two patients, each
with her own TV, often with dueling channels on, blaring. Sometimes you'll hear odd cries and calls from residents. Older homes have overhead paging systems that everyone can hear; newer ones have wireless devices that are much less obtrusive. Take a moment on your tour to just listen."—Richard L. Peck

- "What should you look for? I always say staffing, staffing, staffing. Our recommendation for a daytime staff-to-patient ratio is one to five. One should be a direct caregiver, like an aide. We recommend one to ten during the evening shift, and one to 15 overnight. If you have residents with dementia who need lots of monitoring, you need to staff up."—Robyn Grant, director of public policy and advocacy at the National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care

- "If it smells like urine, that's obviously a bad sign. But if all you smell is pine cleaner, I'd be a little suspicious about that, too, wondering what odors it's covering. What you want the place to smell like is a clean home, with no strong scent that's good or bad."—Richard L. Peck

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Chris Brown — I'm sorry you are lost. I'm an atheist and easily see that modern religion in America is under attack.

PlainOldThetan — I distrust Angelina Jolie and Kristen Stewart equally.

Randomname — I live in the U.S. We are so fat.

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Sarah — I missed my ex bad. My family and friends were tired of me being so upset one of them actually ordered a...

You gotta discharge-sorry — I agree with all except the one about the discharge planners. You have to stay 3 midnights in the hospital to get Medicare to cover the care in a long term care facility, but if your condition does not require hospitalization after day three, you do have to discharge the hospital, whether you have found your optimum facility or not. Your statement is extremely misleading. People can’t just hang out in the hospital while taking days and days to shop nursing homes. Right or wrong, that is the reality.

Julie Cason — Yes, but my parents' LTC company went broke, and so many more aren’t writing useful policies anymore. What say you to that?

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