

## Care Home Visit Checklist

This is one of the most expensive and emotional decisions anyone will ever make. Often the decision is made under duress, after a short period of illness in hospital, and without any previous discussion having taken place. What matters to each person is different, and there are things missing from this list that will matter to you, but it is offered as a general prompt about what you might consider if you have to make this decision for yourself or on behalf of someone who might be ill and confused.

- 1 Visit the place if you can. If not ask a friend to visit. When you go, take someone with you so that you can compare your observations after. While one is distracted with the conversation, another may be noticing things. Have your list of questions ready and don't be afraid to write down notes while you are there. Ask around your friends and neighbours. Local reputation is often as reliable as the website or leaflets. Notice what it is like to first go into the place. Can you get easily through the door or are you kept waiting outside and are you welcomed? First impressions matter, in particular air quality and smells. How hard was it to get there by bus, or if you got there by car, how easy is the parking? Informal can be nice, but are they too casual? Can people visit at any time and stay overnight? Trust your instinct.
- 2 Is the resident's room attractive? Have a look at examples of dementia friendly design and compare it. (Your relative may not have confusion but people sometimes develop that while in a care home and the right design can reduce confusion). You will see examples here <http://dementia.stir.ac.uk/design/virtual-environments/virtual-care-home>. You want to know that you can take favourite bits of furniture and hang as many pictures on the wall as you like and personalise the room. TV and WiFi access may be important to you. Also a secure place for valuables. Being able to control the temperature is vital as is access to some fresh air.
- 3 You are looking for an en suite toilet and shower. If the resident becomes frail and needs help with bathing and going to the toilet, privacy and dignity are of prime importance. That's easier if the toilet is private. Also you should be able to see where it is when lying in the bed. There should also be an assisted bathing room nearby, which is a room that residents can go to for a nice soak in a bath, with help if needed.

- 4 Outside space is very important. You need to be able to access it when you want, whether that is a roof terrace, a balcony or a garden. Can you sit quietly out there and are there places where visiting children can play and you can watch them? What is the story on pets? Are there animals around, and can you bring your own?
- 5 What are the staff like? Do they seem to know the residents by name, and are they respectful to them, for example asking permission before entering their room and waiting for more than a heartbeat after knocking on doors? What is their level of training, and is it externally validated in addition to 'in house' or 'on the job' learning? Who has the highest relevant qualification in the whole team, and where are they today? What is the staff turnover like? Is it hard to keep staff? Again, trust your instinct as you see them going about their work. Is it a happy place?
- 6 Can a person come to the home for a trial period? What are the terms and conditions? Ask for written information to take away including details about security of tenure and complaints. What is the feedback process? Is it clear exactly what the cost is and what is included in the weekly charges? Paying for care is a complex issue and you will need independent financial advice.
- 7 Is there any restriction on what the residents can do? I might like to wash my own personal clothes if there is a domestic laundry room. Can I prepare a simple meal for myself or with a visitor? What happens about smoking? People sometimes are not allowed to spend the day in their own room but are made to go to a communal area. You might not like that idea. What happens if I want to go out, or go away for a weekend or even a week on holiday?
- 8 What is the communal area like and what are the communal activities like? Can I get exercise? Can I choose to take part? Especially with outdoor visits and going to church, how often am I guaranteed to get what I want? Is there work I can do, such as helping in the library, shop or café, or tending the garden, or cleaning my own room? Do we have a hairdresser or other visiting services?
- 9 What is done to make the food interesting? And when is it available? Is the dining area where I have to go domestic in size, and can I choose to eat

alone in my room? Can the home cater for me if I am vegetarian, vegan or have other special religious or dietary requirements?

10 If I become ill, who will be my GP? Will they check on me regularly, along with other health related staff such as podiatrist, dentist, optometrist, and everyone in between? Can I stay here if I am dying, and not have to be put in a hospital? Can relatives stay over with me when that is happening?

By Prof June Andrews, author of *Dementia: The One-Stop Guide*.