

Suggested Questions to Ask/Areas to Investigate in LTC

***Staff Matters**

Ask about the staff turnover within the home. Working in a nursing home is an extremely demanding job both physically and mentally. Any nursing home will have a high turnover rate, but a quality one will also have staff members who have been there for many years and seem to be happy. Is there any specialized training offered to your employee to better understand Huntington Disease? Does the facility provide orientation for all new employees? Are employees trained regarding abuse, neglect and mistreatment of residents? Does the facility check the backgrounds of employees to ensure there is no history of abuse? Do employees receive specialized training on how to manage aggressive, combative, verbally abusive, disruptive and/or resistant residents? Find out if there are people on staff who are experienced in Huntington care and can handle your loved one's condition. You want to know that there are people in the home who are familiar with the condition and will be able to help manage it.

Staffing during the workweek is usually adequate but ask what the specific staffing levels are on the weekends, holidays, and evenings. Care never ends; you want to choose a facility that maintains proper staffing even during these non-peak times.

Does the staff seem to genuinely care about the residents in the home? Do they interact with them and talk to them with respect and care? The job satisfaction of the staff will have a profound impact on the quality of elder health care they provide.

***The Other Residents**

How many Huntington patients do you currently have? Take a good look at the other residents. Ask yourself if they seem to be happy. Look to see if any are actively engaged in activities or games. Are they clean and groomed; wearing clean clothes. Try to observe the nursing home during meal times as well as during activities.

If you happen to encounter another visiting family, stop and ask them how happy they are with their elder care services and the home in general.

Take note of the residents' nails- are they well cared for and clean? This is a little detail but can reflect the quality of care to some extent.

***The Facility**

Is the facility accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) or the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF)? Are the survey results available for inspection? If any deficiencies are noted, have they been corrected? Ask to see the licenses held by the facility. Choose one that has all required state licenses. Find out what the state requirements regarding the ratio of staff members to clients and then make sure the home you choose consistently maintains that ratio.

Ask to take a tour. Observe whether the facility is environmentally cheerful, clean and pleasant? Ask if your loved one will be placed in a separate wing or area. Look for a facility that is clean and does not have any strong odors. A heavy deodorizer scent may be masking the smell of urine. Check above door

jams to see if areas are being dusted regularly. Look at fire extinguishers to see if they are being turned and shaken every month in accordance with fire code.

Look around and see if the facilities buildings and grounds maintained in good condition?

***How is individual care determined and managed?**

Meals

A quality facility will have dieticians on staff to ensure that a balanced diet is being served. Find out if they can handle special dietary needs. Ask if special treats or meals are allowed to be brought in for your family member. Do the residents all enjoy meals together in one large room or do they eat separately?

Personal Care

Routine is important. Ask how patients care is determined and carried out. Be specific about bathing, grooming etc. Regular activities are important for people of all ages. Find out if they have an activity director. If not, ask how they handle having regular activities for the residents. Find out if outdoor activities are included as well as indoor options.

***Location**

The location you choose is extremely important. You want to choose one that is close to home so it will be more convenient for you to visit. Choosing one that is nearby can also make it easier to bring your loved one home for holiday visits and other special occasions. Location should not be the only deciding factor, but it should definitely be kept in mind.

***Check for Complaints and Violations**

Violations of state code become public record. Don't just look at the number of violations; look to see what they are for. Violations can range from a minor housekeeping issue to serious issues of abuse or neglect. Check into the facility's record before making any final decisions

***Surprise Visit**

Any nursing home worth using will be willing to let you drop in for a visit. If they require that you schedule a visit days or weeks in advance, ask them why they require that much notice. Visiting at the last minute will provide you with a solid glimpse of how clean the facility normally is, how it usually operates, and what level of elder health care they are providing. Make sure you understand what is expected from the family? A facility that has no expectations probably won't welcome visitors

Don't hesitate to ask who the facility physician is. Ask to meet the Director of Nursing.

Meet with the Social Worker especially if you need to apply for Medicare in NC.