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Stretched to the Limit: When You Need Help Caring for Aging Family Members

A thorough evaluation of your loved one's condition and support system is an important first step, advises the National Citizens' Coalition for Nursing Home Reform.



When the burden falls upon you to find care options for an aging parent, it's easy to become overwhelmed. The decision can be an emotional one for you and your family. Yet there are many more options available now than there were a decade ago. Approach the process as an informed consumer with these tips and resources.

In-home care, assisted living and nursing home facilities may be among the options you consider for a parent who is unable to live without some level of help.

A thorough evaluation of your loved one's condition and support system is an important first step, advises the National Citizens' Coalition for Nursing Home Reform (NCCNHR) in its *Guide to Choosing a Nursing Home*. Based on this evaluation, you can determine whether long-term care or short-stay rehabilitation is needed.

"When properly diagnosed and treated, some conditions may improve significantly," the guide states. "Also, some people with serious medical conditions can

remain at home with the proper support system."

The guide recommends talking with your loved one to learn their wishes. Even

unable to live independently. Unlike a nursing homes, assisted living facilities do not provide 24-hour nursing care.



those with dementia or difficulty communicating should be engaged in the decision-making as much as possible. Since most people prefer to stay in their own home, it is important to investigate alternatives to nursing home care.

Assisted Living or Nursing Facility?

Make sure you're clear about the differences in the levels of care available. An assisted living facility provides housing, meals, personal care and supportive services to those who are

"Even doctors who make referral decisions sometimes confuse assisted living facilities with nursing homes," says Hanna Cook, administrator for Taylor Care Center, a 120-bed skilled nursing facility in Jacksonville. "Ask questions so that you understand what level of care your family member actually requires."

Cook recommends online research before visiting prospective facilities, to learn how to select a care

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Finding Care for a Loved One

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facility, what questions to ask, and what criteria to examine.

“There is a tremendous amount of information available on the state Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) web site, accessible through MyFlorida.com,” she says. The AHCA inspects nursing homes every year. Survey results are available online, and by law, are posted at the nursing home facility. The survey includes a facility tour; interviews with residents, families, staff, visitors and volunteers; assessments of resident rights, protections and activities; and medical record reviews.

“The AHCA site has a very useful Nursing Home Compare feature,” says Cook. “One of the things you want to look for are the results of the last three surveys, not just the most recent. If an earlier survey shows citations for some problems, for example, you want to see that they have turned things around.”

In-Home Care

If your loved one can stay at home with some extra assistance, you’ll want to check the credentials of the provider you choose. “Look for membership in the National Private Duty Association as one indicator of a quality home care provider,” says Ed Butler, CNA, owner of Right at Home, Inc. in the Jacksonville area. The in-home care and assistance agency has offices throughout Florida and the U.S. “You’ll want to insist that the home care agency provide trained, insured and bonded caregivers. Also expect the caregiver to actively participate in formulating a care plan along with a physician and family members. For any individual, whether they have Alzheimer’s, dementia or other debilitating illness, you want the home health caregiver to be qualified to interact with them, not simply sit with them while they’re in a chair or the bed. Look for training that enables the caregiver to

keep the patient physically active whenever possible.”

Take Care of You, Too

Dealing with a family member as they make a transition to a new living situation can be exhausting. “Make sure you take care of yourself, and get help from local community agencies, paid caregivers or respite care providers when you need it,” says Butler. Your Faculty Assistance Program can also save you time searching for the resources you need.

Resources:

- www.fdhc.state.fl.us (Nursing Home Guide)
- www.FloridaHealthStat.com
- www.eldercare.gov
- www.aoa.gov/NAIC/Notes/caregiverresource.html
- www.alz.org
- www.rightathome.net
- “The 36-Hour Day: A Family Guide to Caring for Persons with Alzheimer Disease, Related Dementing Illnesses, and Memory Loss in Later Life” by Nancy L. Mace and Peter V. Rabins
- “Learning to Speak Alzheimer’s: A Groundbreaking Approach for Everyone Dealing with the Disease” by Joanne Koening Coste

What Level of Care?

Even doctors who make referral decisions sometimes confuse assisted living facilities with nursing homes, says Hanna Cook, administrator, Taylor Care Center. Make sure you’re clear about the differences when exploring care for a loved one.



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Wood & Associates
4700 N. Habana Avenue Suite 300
Tampa, FL 33614
(813) 871-1293
(800) 343-4670
www.woodassociates.net

Recharging Your Batteries – Serene Spots to Soothe the Senses

Escaping into a serene natural setting is one of the healthiest things you can do for your own sense of well-being. Here are two peaceful spots within two hours of the USF main campus.

Kanapaha Botanical Gardens, Gainesville (123 miles)
What to do: Stroll the 1½ mile

paved walkway, pause at garden gazebos, scenic ponds, giant moss-draped oaks, marvel at stands of Chinese royal bamboo, or watch for birds along the shore of Lake Kanapaha. www.kanapaha.org

Historic Bok Sanctuary and Gardens (68 miles)
What to do: Time your visit to

include a Singing Tower carillon concert, held at 1 and 3 p.m. daily. Discover picturesque vistas throughout the landscaped grounds amid acres of ferns, palms, oaks and pines and surprising splashes of color. Catch a glimpse of native birds and wildlife at the Window by the Pond. www.boksanctuary.org