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Infection: The Missouri LRI Study

David R. Mehr et al. *JAMA*. 2001;286(19):2427.

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# Nursing Homes

**N**ursing homes (also called **skilled nursing facilities**) are places that provide 24-hour services and supervision to people who need assistance because of physical or mental conditions. Nursing homes are not hospitals; they are places where rehabilitative and nursing care is provided as needed by qualified staff. There are over 17,000 nursing homes in the United States. The November 21, 2001, issue of *JAMA* contains an article about lower respiratory tract infections among nursing home residents.

## SELECTING A NURSING HOME

- Ask questions—physicians, friends, relatives, and social workers may have information about specific nursing homes in your area to help you locate one with a good reputation.
- Call nursing facilities of interest and ask about the number of residents, cost, and participation in Medicare and Medicaid, and about transportation, housekeeping, meals, and the special needs of your loved one.
- Be sure that the facility and the facility administrator are licensed by the state.
- Try to find a home that is not far from the resident's doctor and that is near a hospital you trust. Be sure regular medical attention is ensured and that emergency as well as routine drugs are available. Check if there is a physical therapy program run by a qualified physical therapist.
- Visit any place that you are considering and speak with the staff, the residents, and relatives of residents, if possible. Check to be sure the building is safe, clean, well lit, and has proper handrails.
- Try to choose a facility that is close by and easy for friends and family to visit. Ask about how often relatives and friends may visit and when the resident is permitted to leave the facility.
- Check about the social programs, exercise, and activities offered by the facility and decide if they would be enjoyable for the resident. Find out what types of group and individual activities are offered.

## ONCE YOU HAVE CHOSEN A NURSING HOME

- Before you sign the facility's contract, be sure you understand it in full. You may want to have an attorney look it over. Be sure finances will cover the cost of nursing home care.
- Tell the facility about the resident to ensure he or she will be made as comfortable as possible.
- Try to bring a few personal items that are familiar and cherished. Make sure the resident has all the clothing he or she needs. Label clothes with the resident's name.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Administration on Aging (Department of Health and Human Services)  
800/677-1116  
[www.aoa.dhhs.gov](http://www.aoa.dhhs.gov)
- National Institute on Aging  
800/222-2225  
[www.nia.nih.gov](http://www.nia.nih.gov)
- American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging  
202/783-2242  
[www.aahsa.org](http://www.aahsa.org)
- American Health Care Association  
202/842-4444  
[www.ahca.org](http://www.ahca.org)
- Guide to Choosing a Nursing Home  
[www.medicare.gov/publications/pubs/pdf/nhguide.pdf](http://www.medicare.gov/publications/pubs/pdf/nhguide.pdf)

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Sources: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging, American Health Care Association, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, National Aging Information Center, National Alliance for Caregiving, National Center for Assisted Living

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