

How to Choose an Elder Care Facility

To ensure that you or a loved one get top-notch elder care, local experts recommend that you:

Visit the facility. Get a sense of the atmosphere, talk to the nursing coordinator and admissions director, and take a walking tour to see the place in action. Ask how care is structured. How often does the doctor come? Is there more than one doctor? Can you keep your family doctor? How do caregivers attend to a loved one when the doctor isn't there?

Call your Area Agency on Aging. Each county in the Lehigh Valley has one of these government offices. They can help you determine the level of care you need and choose the best facility you can afford.

Plan ahead. Consider long-term care insurance decades before you need it. For many people, paying premiums (even if you start as early as your 40s) is cheaper than paying directly for care when you're older, says John Mehler of the Northampton County Area Agency on Aging. Look for policies that help with the costs of in-home care, personal care and assisted living as well as nursing home expenses.

Encourage a positive attitude. "People often lose some of their liberties in a nursing home due to their condition," says geriatrician Francis Salerno, M.D., of Lehigh Valley Hospital and Health Network. "You can't necessarily get up at midnight to make yourself a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. But people who do well still see themselves as individuals with self-worth and integrity. They see themselves contributing to society, even if it's the society of the nursing home."

Work with the staff. Nursing home rooms are usually doubles, and in some cases, there are three or four residents to a room. Bring any roommate problems or other questions to the nurses' attention. There is usually a resident council that can help resolve issues.

Visit frequently. Stop by regularly, check in by phone and become friends with the nurses. All these things help ensure your loved one will get the best care.

Complete 'advance directives' while a loved one is competent to make his or her own decisions about end-of-life care. Doing this ahead of time can resolve many issues about health care that might otherwise divide a family.



LEHIGH VALLEY HOSPITAL
Cedar Crest & I-78, Allentown
17th & Chew Streets, Allentown

LEHIGH VALLEY HOSPITAL—
MUHLENBERG
Route 22 & Schoenersville Road
Bethlehem

lvh.org
610-402-CARE

For more information
or for a physician referral,
call 610-402-CARE