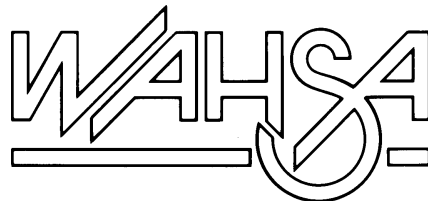


***Choosing an Assisted Living Facility:
Comparing Apples to Apples!***

A Report Provided by



Wisconsin Association of Homes and Services for the Aging
204 South Hamilton Street
Madison WI 53703
(608) 255-7060
info@wahsa.org
www.wahsa.org

and

Grace Lutheran Foundation

Choosing an Assisted Living Facility: Comparing Apples to Apples!

According to the National Center for Assisted Living, assisted living is a long term care alternative for seniors who need more assistance than is available in a retirement community but who do not require the heavy medical and nursing care provided in a nursing facility. While many seniors relocate to an assisted living residence after a period of rehabilitation in a nursing home or hospital, nearly half come directly from their homes.

Assisted living residences are designed to be operated, staffed, and maintained to best meet the needs and desires of their residents. Security and independence, privacy and companionship, and physical and social well-being are the primary characteristics of an assisted living setting; this accounts for its popularity among seniors and their families.

Individuals receive, as needed, supervision, personal care assistance, and health care services that emphasize their right to control their lives. Extended life expectancy and the graying of America are at the heart of the unprecedented demand for a variety of long term health care services. In 2000, about one in eight Americans was aged 65 or older; by 2030, it is estimated that approximately one in five will be aged 65 or older.

Assisted living promotes independence and dignity for each resident and encourages the involvement of a resident's family and friends. Staff is available to meet both scheduled and unscheduled needs. Communities typically offer dining, as well as social and wellness activities designed to support a well-rounded lifestyle.

Assisted living residences also might be called residential care facilities, adult congregate living facilities, continuing care retirement communities (CCRCs), personal care homes, retirement homes for adults, or community residences. A unique transition from independent living without care, assisted living communities help seniors enjoy an improved quality of life with independence and care combined.

The Assisted Living Federation of America gives us the following checklist for comparing Assisted Living Facilities. These are some of the more important questions that should be asked and considered when it's time to make a transition to a new living arrangement.

Appearance

- As you arrive at the residence, do you like its location and outward appearance?
- As you enter the lobby and tour the residence, is the decor attractive and homelike?
- Do you receive a warm greeting from staff welcoming you to the residence?
- Does the administrator/staff call residents by name and interact warmly with them as you tour the residence?
- Do residents socialize with each other and appear happy and comfortable?
- Are you able to talk with residents about how they like the residence and staff?
- Do the residents seem to be appropriate housemates for you or your loved one?
- Are staff members appropriately dressed, personable, and outgoing?
- Do the staff members treat each other in a professional manner?
- Are the staff members that you pass during your tour friendly to you?
- Are visits with the resident welcome at any time?

Physical Features

- Is the community well-designed for your needs?
- Is the floor plan easy to follow?
- Are doorways, hallways, and rooms accommodating to wheelchairs and walkers?
- Are elevators available for those unable to use stairways?
- Does a physician or nurse visit residents regularly to provide medical checkups?
- To what extent are medical services available, and how are these services provided?
- Are handrails available to aid in walking?
- Are cupboards and shelves easy to reach?
- Are floors of a non-skid material and carpets firm to ease walking?
- Does the residence have good natural and artificial lighting?
- Is the residence clean, free of odors, and appropriately heated/cooled?
- Does the residence have sprinklers and clearly marked exits?
- Does the residence have a means of security if a resident wanders?

Services

- Is staff available to meet scheduled and unscheduled needs?
- Can the residence provide a list of services available?
- Is staff available to provide 24-hour assistance with activities of daily living (ADLs) if needed? (ADLs include dressing, eating, mobility, hygiene and grooming, bathing, toileting, using the telephone, shopping, and laundry.)
- Does the residence provide housekeeping services in residents' units?
- Can residents arrange for transportation on fairly short notice?
- Are pharmacy, barber/beautician, and/or physical therapy services offered on-site?
- Are additional services available if the resident's needs change?
- Is there a procedure to pay for additional services like nursing care when the services are needed on a temporary basis?
- Are there different costs for various levels or categories of services?
- Do billing, payment, and credit policies seem fair and reasonable?
- May residents handle their own finances with staff assistance if able, or should a family member or outside party be designated to do so?
- Are residents required to purchase renters' insurance for personal property in their units?
- Is there an appeals process for dissatisfied residents?

Medication & Health Care

- Does the residence have specific policies regarding storage of medication, assistance with medications, training and supervision of staff, and record keeping?
- Is self-administration of medication allowed?
- Is there a staff person to coordinate home health care visits from a nurse, physical therapist, occupational therapist, etc. if needed?
- Is staff available to assist residents who experience memory, orientation, or judgment losses?
- Does the residence have a clearly stated procedure for responding to a resident's medical emergency?
- Are residents' pets allowed in the residence? Who is responsible for their care?
- Do volunteers, including family members, come into the residence to help with or to conduct programs?
- Does the residence create a sense of community by encouraging residents to participate in activities?

Food Service

- Do dining room menus vary from day to day and meal to meal?
- Does the residence provide three nutritionally balanced meals a day, seven days a week?
- Are snacks available?
- May a resident request special foods, and can the residence accommodate special dietary needs?
- Are common dining areas available?
- May residents eat meals in their units?
- May meals be provided at a time a resident would like, or are there set times for meals?

Individual Unit Features

- Are different sizes and types of units available?
- Are units for single and double occupancy available?
- Do residents have their own lockable doors?
- Is a 24-hour emergency response system accessible from the unit?
- Are bathrooms private and designed to accommodate wheelchairs and walkers?
- Are residents able to bring their own furnishings for their unit? What may they bring? What is provided?
- Do all units have a telephone and cable or satellite TV? How is billing handled?
- Is a kitchen area provided with a refrigerator, sink, and cooking element?
- May residents keep food in their units?
- May residents smoke in their units? In public spaces?
- May residents decorate their own units?

Social & Recreational Activities

- Is there evidence of organized activities, such as a posted daily schedule, events in progress, reading materials, visitors, etc.?
- Do residents participate in activities outside of the residence in the neighboring community?
- Does the residence have its own pets?
- Does the residence provide transportation to doctors' offices, the hairdresser, shopping, and other activities desired by residents?

Cost and Payment Options

- Most assisted living facilities are private pay only. Medicare and often times Medicaid are not accepted forms of payment. (Each facility will be different)
- Does the residence accept long-term care insurance? Some long-term care insurers only will pay for care in "licensed" assisted living facilities.
- Does the facility accept VA benefits or waivers?

The State of Wisconsin

There are three types of assisted living in Wisconsin: community-based residential facilities (CBRF), adult family homes (AFH), and residential care apartment complexes (RCAC). Assisted living facilities are designed to provide residential environments that enhance independence to the extent possible and are the least restrictive of each resident's freedom. Regulatory oversight is provided by the Office of Quality Assurance under the supervision of the Department of Health and Family Services.

In summary, it is important to contrast and compare two or three assisted living options in your area before making a decision. Assisted living is an excellent alternative and transition between home and nursing home, and has quickly become one of the most popular options for "aging in place".

For more information, contact your local assisted living facility.