

# Checklist: visiting a care home

Use these lists of questions when you're visiting a care home. The more information you have, the more confident you will feel about making the best choice.

It can be very useful to visit a home with a family member or friend. One of you can focus on talking to staff/having the official tour, and the other can have a look around the place and talk to residents away from the staff. Even the smell of the home can affect the way you think about it, and it's helpful to be able to discuss this sort of thing with someone else after the visit.

## Questions to ask about fees and other contractual details

These questions and their answers should be reflected in the care home's contract.

### Fees

- Plan ahead: it's worth thinking about respite care options in advance of when it's needed. How much are the fees?
- How are fees calculated? What do they include and exclude?
- Does the care home collect fees weekly or monthly? On what date or day of the week?
- Are they paid in advance or arrears?
- How can they be paid?
- Are residents tied in to the contract for a minimum period?
- If a resident has to leave the care home, would they be entitled to a pro-rata refund of any fees already paid?

- What happens if a resident dies while living in the care home or staying in hospital? Will fees have to be paid for a certain length of time?

### Additional costs

- Are there any additional charges, such as a management fee? If so, how much is it? Is it a one-off payment or an annual payment?
- What are the charges for any additional services, such as hairdressing and newspapers, and are residents allowed to 'shop around' for these services or are they tied to using those provided by the care home? What services are charged for in addition to the main fee? How are they billed?
- If relevant, how are NHS-funded nursing care payments accounted for in the fee structure (they should be deducted from the overall fee)?
- How frequently are fees reviewed? How much were they increased last time and when did this happen?

### Fee reductions

- What is the care home's policy on periods of non-occupancy?
- How long does a resident have to be absent before any reduced fees apply?
- What are the reduced fees, and how are they calculated?
- How long can these reduced rates last? Is there a limit to how long a resident can be absent from the care home before their contract is affected?

**Deposit**

- Is it necessary to pay an advance payment of deposit? Is it refundable?
- When a resident moves in, do they get the deposit back or is this deducted from the care home fees?
- What happens to any deposit paid if the contract is cancelled by either party?
- Under what circumstances might the deposit not be returned in full?

**Notice periods**

- How much notice does the home give for fee increases?
- How much notice will residents get if provision of service or levels of care are going to change?
- How much notice must a resident give if they want to leave?
- How much notice must the care home provider give if they want residents to leave?

**Policies**

- What is the care home's complaints procedure?
- What training do they give staff?

**Questions to ask about the potential room**

- What would happen if the resident is a self-funder and they ran out of money? Could they stay at the home if the local authority were paying for the room? Could they stay in the same room?
- Can you look at the room your relative might be offered? Would it be possible for them to move rooms later, if they wanted?
- Could they bring their own furniture and possessions? How much space is there?
- Are there private/en suite toilet and bathroom facilities? Are they suitably adapted?
- Is there a telephone point in the room, or somewhere that a resident can make private phone calls?
- Is there wi-fi in the room and in public spaces around the home?
- Is there an emergency call system available in each room?
- Are the corridors/toilets wide enough for a walking frame or wheelchair?
- After a resident's death, how much time does their next of kin have to clear the room of personal possessions?

**Questions to ask about other practical issues**

- When would space be available? Is there a waiting list?
- What's the ratio of care workers to residents, both by day and at night? Does the home use agency staff? If so, how many / what is the ratio to permanent carer workers?

- Can special care needs be met, even during the night? If your loved one's condition should worsen (for example, they needed nursing care rather than just personal care), could the care home provide this?
- What social activities are on offer for residents to take part in? Will there be outings and visits that suit your loved one, such as pub trips for a social drinker or a visit to a concert? Tell them about your loved one's quirks and interests to gauge this.
- What's the surrounding area like, and is it easy for friends and family to reach by car or public transport?
- Are there set visiting times for guests?
- Are children welcome?
- Can guests stay overnight?
- Can guests stay for meals? What are the charges for this?
- What checks are in place to stop unwanted people coming in, or residents from wandering out?
- Can residents go to their room when they wish to be alone?
- Are residents allowed pets? Does the home have its own pets?
- Is there somewhere safe and secure where your relative could keep valuables, such as ID, credit cards, money and jewellery?
- If you, or your relative, are unhappy with any aspect of care, what is the procedure for giving feedback or raising complaints?

### **In and around the home**

- Is the home happy for you to be involved in your loved one's life - for example, could you do their hair or take them out to a café?
- Is the home interested in your family member as a person - do they ask questions and demonstrate flexibility? For example, can a late riser stay in bed until 11am or a night owl enjoy a midnight snack?
- Do there seem to be enough staff on duty when you're there? Are they friendly? Do they make time to talk to individual residents?
- Who provides the food? Can you see a menu or even sample a meal while you are there?
- Are mealtimes flexible?
- Where is food served? Could a resident eat in their room if they wanted to?
- Is there a communal lounge with or without TV? Is there a quiet area where music isn't played and without a TV?
- Is there a secure garden/outdoor space for residents to use whenever they want? Do they have to ask if they can go outside?
- Are there smoking and non-smoking areas?
- Are there enough toilets within easy reach of the bedrooms and living area?
- If your relative has reduced mobility, are all areas of the care home (their room, communal areas) easily accessible? Are there grab rails in the bathroom, for example, if needed? Are they secure?
- Is there a private room, other than bedrooms, where residents can meet guests?
- Is there a residents' committee? How often does it meet?

**Extra notes / comments**