



**LEVANDOWSKI & DARPINO**

An Elder Centered Law Practice  
*Helping to Solve the Puzzle of Long-Term Care*



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## Levandowski & Darpino's Elder Law Advisor

### GET GOOD NURSING HOME CARE

#### *KNOW WHAT TO LOOK FOR AND WHAT TO ASK*

Placing a spouse or a parent in a nursing home is one of the most difficult decisions that you can make. It is fraught with stress. Are you making the right decision? Are you sure there is not another alternative? How will the nursing home be paid? And, most important of all, how can you be sure the nursing home will provide good care and quality of life?

This article will deal with getting good care. You should know what to look for and what questions to ask in order to make the right decision.

### HOW DO YOU FIND THE RIGHT NURSING HOME?

Ask for recommendations from doctors, friends, social workers, clergy, etc. Speak to family members of nursing home residents to get a full understanding of life in the home.

Shop around. Call the nursing homes you are considering and request information packets including an activity calendar and menu. Visit each home you are considering. Don't schedule your tours. Show up during regular business hours. Visit a second time in the evening or on the weekend to see if there is a difference in the atmosphere or the care.

Pennsylvania is required by federal and state

### FAMILY INVOLVEMENT: GETTING GOOD NURSING HOME CARE

Once your family member is living in a nursing home, your continued care, support, love, and involvement in his or her life are key to getting good care there. Make sure you:

- Visit frequently
- Encourage others to visit
- Speak up to raise concerns
- Attend quarterly care plan meetings
- Advocate for individualized care
- Follow up on the agreed upon care plan
- Get to know the staff and help them to get to know your family member
- Document (date, time, persons involved) any problems you observe so that managers or the ombudsman can investigate

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law to inspect each nursing home regularly to make sure they meet health and safety standards. It is important to research any facility that you plan to visit. A good place to start is [Nursing Home Compare](http://www.medicare.gov) at [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov). If you have any questions or concerns regarding inspection results, address them with a home's administrator.

**Some things to look for:**

- Do the residents seem happy and talk freely with the staff?
- Mealtimes can be chaotic and the best time to determine how the staff and residents interact. Notice if the staff remains friendly and pleasant. Do they assist residents with opening containers, using silverware, and eating?
- Is the admissions director concerned about your family member's individual wants and needs?
- Is the home clean? Are there any strong odors?
- Are there residents in physical restraints? If so, why?
- How convenient is the home's location to family and friends who will want to visit the resident?

**Some things to ask about:**

- What steps does the home take to prevent the use of physical or chemical

restraints?

- Find out what a resident's typical day is like.
- How many caregivers does each resident have? A resident should have as few caregivers as possible. Staff members who consistently care for a resident often develop strong bonds that make for better care. Consistent care assignments are important for all residents, but especially for people with Alzheimer's or those with other dementia who can become distressed when faced with someone unfamiliar.
- Is staff trained to handle special conditions such as behavior associated with dementia or Alzheimer's disease? Staff trained to care for residents with these conditions are more likely to understand the meaning of behaviors such as wandering or yelling and can better meet a resident's needs.

**“You know you’re getting old when all the names in your black book have M.D. after them.”**

*- Harrison Ford*

**AFTER YOU GET YOUR FAMILY MEMBER INTO A GOOD NURSING HOME, HOW CAN YOU MAKE SURE THEY GET THE CARE THEY NEED?**

The key here is to have the proper care plan in place. A care plan is essentially a road map for your family member's care. The nursing home staff is required by law to develop an individualized plan of care for each resident shortly after admission. A team which may include a doctor, nurse, social worker, dietician, and physical, occupational, or recreational therapists are involved in creating the care plan.

The family must be made part of this process. The nursing home team must solicit information from both the resident and family about the resident's medical, psychological, spiritual, and social needs. You can also contribute information about your family member's preferences and usual

routine. For example, you might tell the staff, “Dad likes to listen to the radio as he falls asleep.” Share as much information as possible.

**Make sure you are involved.**

**Know what the plan is.**

**Get a written copy of the completed care plan. This will allow you to manage your family member's care.**

One of the best ways you can help your family member is to tell the staff, in writing, as much information as possible about your family member -- likes and dislikes, typical daily routine, pet peeves, etc. Also, get to know the staff. Let them know how committed you are to your family member's care and that you are there to help.

Nursing homes are different than hospitals. Physicians visit on a regular basis but are not there everyday. The director of nursing is in charge of health issues. The nursing home administrator is in charge of all of the departments. Get to know them both. Be sure to tell them when care is good. Speak up if you have concerns, questions, or suggestions.

Watch for pressure ulcers or “bed sores.” Residents who cannot move by themselves, or who have dementia, are more likely to

have pressure ulcers. Staff should help to prevent them by inspecting the skin daily. They should also carefully turn or move a resident, or remind them to move themselves. Staff should keep residents clean and dry from incontinence and make sure they eat and drink nutritious food and fluid. The schedule for these preventive measures should be included in the care plan.

Watch for drug interactions. Residents often take many drugs. Some are prescribed, while others are over-the-counter medications like vitamins. The more medications someone takes, the more likely they are to have a drug interaction. The addition of any new medication needs monitoring by the nursing home staff. Family should alert the staff if they notice sleepiness or confusion, or any changes since it could be from the medication.

By law, nursing homes must review a resident's care plan at least every three months. A new meeting is held to update the resident's care plan. As a care advocate,

you'll want to monitor your family member's care to be sure the nursing home is providing the care outlined in the care plan. This is the best way to ensure that your family member gets personal and appropriate care in the nursing home.

I highly recommend purchasing the publication “Twenty Common Nursing Home Problems and How to Resolve Them”. It is available at the National Senior Citizens Law Center website ([www.nsclc.org](http://www.nsclc.org)) for \$9.95.

To sum up, stay informed and involved. Visit as frequently as you can. Encourage others to visit. Express your opinion. Know what's going on with your family member. Get more information about the various conditions your family member has so you can know what to expect. Get to know the caregivers and other residents and their families.

No nursing home is going to be able to care for your family member exactly the way you would. The best you can do is to manage the situation to get the best care possible.

**DISCLAIMER:** This newsletter is intended for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. For legal advice, consult a licensed attorney. Any examples used are simplified for ease of understanding and illustration of general concepts.



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“Age is an issue of mind over matter.  
If you don’t mind, it doesn’t matter.”

*-Mark Twain*



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