

# Putting Care Right

Your guide to  
choosing a care home

# Putting Care Right

Taking the decision to move into a care home will always be a difficult one, for the person with dementia and their family. I know this from my own experience. But it can be easier if you are armed with the right information.

This booklet can help people facing that kind of decision by setting out what issues to consider and which questions to ask. The blank pages at the back are for your notes.



Alzheimer's Society's Putting Care Right campaign is about ensuring people with dementia get access to quality care. The Society is calling for compulsory dementia training for care home staff, tougher inspection and regulation and improved support from other health and social care services.

It also means challenging our views. The Society's Home from Home report revealed people's low expectations of care homes. This guide aims to tackle these attitudes by giving people the information they need to demand the care that people with dementia deserve.

There are many ways we can start Putting Care Right. This booklet makes a start by pinpointing the important features to think about before deciding on a care home.



**Tony Robinson**  
Ambassador,  
Alzheimer's Society

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## Ten essentials for choosing a care home

1. Dignity and respect
2. Friends and family
3. The care staff
4. Outside space
5. Care and treatment
6. Bedrooms and living areas
7. Toilets
8. Activities
9. Accessibility
10. Location

# **Where to start?**

Whether you are a person with dementia or a carer there are many things to think about when considering residential care.

Alzheimer's Society produces factsheets on issues like funding and the types of care homes. Details of these are in the back of this booklet.

Once you are ready to start looking at care homes this booklet features tips on things to think about.

# **What to look for in a care home?**

Remember no home is perfect. This guide is a starting point in your search for a care home. You will have your views on what is important and the questions that matter the most to you.

When you visit spend time looking around, talking to the manager, staff and residents. Look at several care homes and visit at different times, for example at the weekend and in the week. If possible go with the person you care for.

First impressions count. Think about how you are greeted and the way staff relate to people with dementia. Do staff speak to residents with dementia directly? Does the home feel homely? Is it warm or too warm?

Do not be afraid to ask questions. This is the best way to get information.

# 1

## Dignity and respect

- Do staff speak to residents in a way the residents like?
- Are people asked how they prefer to be addressed?
- How are residents supported to make their own choices? For example, when and where they can eat.
- Are cultural and religious choices respected such as diet and hygiene practices?

**FACT: Two thirds of all care home residents have dementia**

# 2

## Friends and family

- Are friends and family encouraged to visit whenever they like? Can they stay for the night?
- Can friends and family choose to be involved in mealtimes?
- Are there quiet areas where relatives can spend time with residents?
- Is information readily shared with families and are they supported to become involved in the life of the home? For example, is there a relatives group?

**FACT: 22% of carers were unsatisfied with the amount of involvement they had in decision-making about a relative's care**

# 3

## The care staff

- Are staff friendly, approachable and willing to answer questions openly?
- Do staff interact socially with the residents? Are they ready to just spend time with them?
- Do care staff have training in dementia awareness and dementia care? Ask the manager how often staff have training and who provides it. Ask about the qualifications of those providing training and what qualifications staff hold.
- Is the manager regularly out and about in the home? Do they have a friendly manner with staff and residents?
- Do residents have a named member of staff particularly responsible for their care?
- Do the majority of the staff speak and understand the language spoken by the person with dementia?



## Outside space

- Is there an outside space or garden and is it used?
- Are there activities people can do outside, such as gardening or walking?
- Are people with later stage dementia supported by staff to go outside?

**FACT: Care home staff say training would be the best way to improve job satisfaction**

# 5

## Care and treatment

- Is there a GP who comes to the home regularly? How often?
- Does the home have access to other services, such as community mental health teams, chiropodists and dentists?
- What happens when someone becomes unwell? You should be told straight away. There might be a room where you could stay.
- People with dementia have the right to be involved in care decisions. Will carers also be consulted about all care and treatment, for example any medicines administered?
- How often are prescribed medicines reviewed?
- Do residents have individual care plans that recognise their abilities?

# 6

## Bedrooms and living areas

- Are there communal quiet areas where residents can spend time?
- Do residents have their own room where they can be alone when they want?
- Can residents adjust the heating in their bedrooms?
- Do staff respect people's right to privacy, for example knocking on doors before entering?
- Do people have their own furniture or personal possessions in their room?
- Are communal areas welcoming? Is seating arranged in groups allowing residents to socialise?

# 7

## Toilets

- Are there enough toilets within reach of the bedrooms and living areas?
- Do the toilets appear to be regularly cleaned?
- Are staff trained to be aware when people need the toilet? They should be willing and prepared to take residents to the toilet when they need to go.
- How are residents supported to remain continent?

**FACT: Care home staff say providing care that improves the quality of life of residents with dementia is the most satisfying part of the job**

# 8

## Activities

- Does the home provide personalised activities suitable and engaging for residents with dementia? Ask for examples. Explain the interests of those you care for and ask how these can be met.
- Do some activities relate to everyday life, such as cooking, socialising and shopping which can help a person with dementia maintain a sense of normality?
- People in the later stages of dementia are especially vulnerable to becoming isolated. Are there opportunities for stimulating activities for them in particular?
- Are residents encouraged to take exercise and are there enough staff to supervise them?
- Are there trips organised away from the home? Are events celebrated?

# 9

## Accessibility

- Are toilets and bathing areas suitably adapted? For example, do they have grab rails and a shower seat or bath bench?
- Are areas suitable for equipment that may be needed now or in the future such as wheelchairs or hoists?
- Does the home have pressure mattresses to prevent pressure sores?
- Is the layout and décor sensitive to the needs of people with dementia; for example, clear signage and minimal use of patterns on the floor?

# 10

## Location

- Is the home easy for visitors to get to?
- Is there much noise outside the home; for example from traffic?
- Is there much noise inside the home? For example, some homes have the television on but the residents are not watching it. If a radio is playing is the music appropriate?
- What is there near to the home? If residents enjoy going out there should be facilities nearby that suit their needs, such as a park, pub or shops.

**FACT: More than half of people with a relative or friend in a care home said that person did not have enough to do**

## notes

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