



CHOOSING THE RIGHT CARE HOME

& identifying what financial help is available

A note from the Editor...

If you are caring for a person with dementia, you may have come to the reluctant conclusion that it is no longer safe for them to be left alone. While you may have considered moving the person in with you, this might not be practical. You may work full time and have your own family. Even if you don't have these responsibilities, you may have concluded that providing constant care during the day and having disturbed nights is too much for one person to manage. It may simply be no longer practical for the person with dementia to remain at home. In which case, a care home may well be the only option.

If the responsibility of choosing the right care home is entirely down to you, it can feel like a lot of pressure. And you may feel guilty, especially if you feel at the back of your mind that you should be caring for that person yourself. Try not to be burdened by guilt. In the right care home, the person will receive good care and trained staff will be on hand to meet their needs. The best thing you can do for them now is to do your homework thoroughly and make sure that the care home you choose is reputable and can meet the needs of the person.

My mother Hazel, who has vascular dementia, went into a care home in 2014. I did my research extensively, but the first home didn't live up to my expectations and I had to move her to a more suitable home four months later. She is now settled in her current environment. Hindsight is a wonderful thing, and as the saying goes, 'If I knew then, what I know now...'

That's one of the reasons why I wanted to write this guide. The aim is to provide all the advice you need on choosing a care home so that you can make an informed decision. The more knowledge you have, the more likely you are to find the right home.

I recommend that you start the search now and initiate a conversation with your local authority. If the person is getting noticeably worse, don't leave it to the last minute.

Taking the first steps

You've identified that the person with dementia needs to go into a home, but who pays for it? Can you get some financial assistance? Care in England is not free, and most people will have to pay something towards their own care. Some people will have to pay all of the costs.

In England, the local authority (council) may cover some or all of the cost of care, but firstly, you need to get the person with dementia assessed by the local authority and they have



to agree that the person needs to go into a care home. If the person has been assessed as needing to be in a care home, and their capital is below £23,250, they should be entitled to financial support. It's important to mention, however, that the laws are different in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. There are national rules for each, but also some local variations. Start by contacting your local authority (council) and asking for an assessment.

Good quality information

The Care Act (2014) stipulates that people must have access to good quality information and advice from the first time they contact the local authority. The authority does not have to provide all the advice themselves but they should identify those who would benefit from financial advice and help them access it.

The local authority must carry out an assessment of the person's care and support needs. This is called a 'Needs Assessment'. The local authority

will talk to the person with dementia and to you as their carer, to jointly produce a care and support plan and work out how their needs will be met. After that, the financial assessment will be conducted. This involves establishing who will pay for the care. It will either be paid by the person with dementia or the local authority, or a combination of both. The assessment takes into consideration any income the person receives regularly, such as a pension and any assets, like savings. It may also include the value of their home.

Can you or the person with dementia choose the care home?

If the person is considered eligible for financial assistance, the answer to this question is yes, so long as the home is considered suitable for the person's needs and complies with any terms and conditions set out by the local authority. However, it must not cost more than the authority would normally pay for someone with the same needs. That said, if you have a particular care home in mind which is more expensive than the funds that the local authority is prepared to contribute, then the authority will allow a third party to top up the fees as long as they can afford to keep doing it in the long term. The person cannot top up the fees from capital that is below £23,250. At the time of writing, it has been reported that this threshold will rise from April 2020.

What if the person isn't eligible for funding?

If the person is not eligible for local authority funding, they can choose their own care home and pay for their care. They are then known as a 'Self-Funder'. Once the person's capital reduces to £23,250, they can seek local authority assistance. But if the home costs more than the local authority usually pays, then the person may need to find a way to top up the difference or find an alternative care home. Before the person goes into a more expensive care home,

if you think their money is likely to run out at some point, then ask if the care home owner



would be willing to accommodate the person at social service funding rates in the long-term. Some homes are prepared to do this, but not all of them. It's worth having this conversation and discussing the long-term scenarios with the care home before making any final decisions.

Other support

There may be other sources of financial support available to the person with dementia – including some (and not necessarily all) of the below.

Attendance Allowance – This is provided by the Department of Work and Pensions to those who are 65 and over who require help with personal care. It is not means-tested and is tax-free. There are two levels of financial assistance and it is awarded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). For more information and to apply, visit <https://www.gov.uk/attendance-allowance/overview>

NHS Continuing Healthcare – This is a package of care arranged and funded solely by the NHS. It can be arranged in a variety of situations, including in an NHS hospital, the person's own home and a care home. To be eligible, the person must be assessed by a team of healthcare professionals and identified as having a 'primary health need'. The NHS will look at what help is needed, and the complexity

and intensity of needs. For more information, visit <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/pages/nhs-continuing-care.aspx>

NHS-Funded Nursing Care – If the person is going into a nursing home and is not entitled to NHS Continuing Healthcare, they may be entitled to NHS-funded nursing care if they have a lower level of nursing care requirements. This can only be paid to someone in a care home registered to provide nursing care. For more information, visit <http://www.nhs.uk/chq/Pages/what-is-nhs-funded-nursing-care.aspx>

Don't wait too long

You can see why it's important to start doing your homework early. Assessments can take time to arrange, so don't leave it until the last minute. If you sense that the person with dementia can't



be alone for much longer, start the process now. Incidentally, if you do have to wait for an assessment and the person needs to move into a care home very quickly, if they are later considered eligible for financial help from the NHS then it may be back-dated to the date when you first applied for help.

Different types of care homes

Before we look at the qualities of a good care home, it's important to distinguish between the different types of facilities, so that you can work out what will best suit the person's needs.

What is the difference between a nursing home and a residential care home?

A residential care home (also known as assisted living) is for those who can live independently



to a certain extent but who need help with some tasks, such as being prompted to eat regular meals and take medication. Those who live in a residential care home may be able to carry out some personal care but need some supervision to prevent them from getting lost or confused.

The residential care home will provide long-term care and will provide residents with hot meals in a communal living area, full housekeeping and laundry services and assistance with personal care such as washing, dressing and feeding. Those who live in a residential care home can no longer live independently alone, but don't need the same amount of care provided in a nursing home. The home will have a schedule of regular activities and some homes have a good social element. A person who lives alone and can take care of some of their own needs may respond well to a residential care home with a busy social schedule, as it will give them a chance to mix with other residents.



A nursing home is for those with more complex needs and will have a trained nurse present at all times. They can provide nursing care, and can manage chronic conditions. Residents will have support with personal care, such as washing, bathing, dressing and feeding if necessary. There will also be regular activities and a communal area, as well as a garden. Regular activities at the home may include dancing or wheelchair dancing, as well as crafts and drawing.

Which is best for the person with dementia?

It's important to consider what level of care your parent or loved one is likely to need now and in the future. Their condition will deteriorate, and if you are not sure whether they would be best suited to a residential care home or a nursing home, try to choose a home that will be able to meet their needs in the long term, rather than just considering how they are now. Some care homes also offer nursing care, but a specialist nursing home may be more suitable if the person is in the later stages of dementia. If you are unsure whether they should go into a care home or a

nursing home, then speak with their GP and their mental health team, and seek advice from those currently involved in their care, including other carers.

Finding a care home

You may have a care home in mind that you've seen or one that has been recommended to you, or you may choose to search online to find homes in

a convenient location. It's always best to call the care home in advance and make an appointment to view the home, rather than just turning up. It's also worth asking first if they have capacity. Even if they are currently full, ask if they have a waiting list as things can change swiftly.

I recommend looking at as many homes as you can. You'll begin to get a sense of how standards can vary. Some 'luxury' care homes I looked at for my mother had an overpowering stench of urine, which didn't make a great first impression, while others that were more basic in appearance smelt fresh and looked clean.

TIP: Recommendations may be useful but remember that everyone's needs are different. What is a suitable level of care for one person may be unsuitable for another person. Each person is unique and how much care they require will vary. You need to ensure that the care home you choose can meet the needs of the person with dementia.

Before you visit a care home, it's worth reading the latest inspection report of the home on the Care Quality Commission (CQC) website. The CQC regulates all independent care homes in England and conducts regular (usually annual) inspections of care homes. The idea of these inspections is to ensure that suitable standards are being met. The CQC will look at whether the care home you have in mind is providing care that is safe, effective, caring, responsive and well led. It will rate the home in each of these categories. You can download and read the report free of charge simply by visiting the CQC website and typing in the name of the care home. Visit <http://www.cqc.org.uk>. In addition, some care homes include the latest report on their websites.

And while it may sound controversial, as it's such an important decision, you'll want to know in advance if the care home you have in mind has had any bad publicity. You might also want to type the name of the care home into a Google search with the word 'controversy' at the end. If the home has received bad press, this is a surefire way to find out about it.

TIP: You don't always get what you pay for. In my experience, it's all down to the level of care provided by the staff. If the staff are well managed and motivated, and genuinely caring, the person with dementia may be happier in a more modest environment than a fancy care home with staff who aren't as caring. Even if the person took a lot of pride in their own interior décor when living at home, carpets and wallpaper are less important than you think. Regular interaction with caring staff is not to be underestimated.

Location, location, location

Location is hugely important. You'll want the person with dementia to be near to you, so that you can visit them regularly without having to make a long trip. Think about when and how often you would like to visit them. If you like the idea of dropping in on your way home from work then try to find a care home that is a short drive from your workplace or your nearest train station. A ten or 15-minute journey is ideal.

You may be discussing options with other family members and you may decide that it's best to place the person halfway between you and another relative. Unless 'halfway' is a short drive for each of you, I would personally avoid this scenario.



A care home that's half an hour away from each relative may sound like the perfect solution, but it simply means that both relatives will struggle to visit the person regularly. Be honest with yourself about the situation. A relative who says they intend to visit the person regularly in a care home and isn't currently visiting them much at home won't necessarily keep their word.

Visiting care homes

When you arrive to visit a care home, observe how the residents are being treated by the staff. I remember visiting my mother's nursing home and being struck by the kindness of the staff and how caring they were when talking to the



residents. I also noticed that the communal room was clean and well staffed. Some residents were drinking out of plastic beakers with lids, which indicated to me that their safety was being taken into consideration, while others were being fed by staff, who were cutting up their meals and where necessary, feeding them to ensure they were eating properly. Those who needed extra support were receiving it.

Talk to the residents, though you may get a variable response. Some of them may be less able to articulate their thoughts than others. Ask those who can talk what they think of the home, but be aware that moods can vary. Don't just rely on their feedback. Ask anyone visiting a relative what they think about the home.

Watch the residents

Look at the residents and see how they are interacting. Are they involved in activities? Are they clean and well groomed? Are they encouraged to be as independent as possible? How do the care home staff speak to the residents? Are they respectful and courteous?

Privacy is an important issue, especially if the person with dementia is normally a private or

shy person. Ask if the person can have their own room if this is what they would like, and if they can choose what clothes they would like to wear each day. Can they keep a pet in their room if this is what they want (some care homes allow pets) and add some of their own personal effects to personalise their environment? Do they have the freedom to go to their room when they want to be alone? This is important if the communal areas are occasionally noisy and the person can get agitated by noise.

Food choices

Do they get a choice of meals? If they want to eat in their room, do they have the freedom to do this? Can they have snacks and drinks, like tea and biscuits, in between meals if they want to?

Medication is an important issue. You may have struggled to persuade the person to take medication in the past. Some days they may simply refuse. What sort of provision does the home have in place for residents who either refuses or can't take medication on their own? What happens if a resident is unwell? What is the procedure for getting them the medical help?

Dementia training

Ask the home what sort of training their staff have been given. Is it a home that specialises in dementia? How do the staff appear to be coping with the mood swings and challenging behaviour of the residents? What is their policy on coping with challenging behaviour? In my



mother's nursing home, staff will give mum time and space if she needs it. If she refuses to get up and doesn't want to get dressed, they respect her wishes and will leave her in bed if that's her preference, but they also check on her regularly. If she gets up and refuses to have a wash, they will leave her for a while and try again later, or distract her with calming music.

It's also important to be honest with the care home about the behaviour and needs of the person with dementia. As their carer, you will know more than anyone what they like and dislike, what they find difficult and where they need help.



Mobility issues

If the person is not mobile or doesn't walk very well then ask what provision will be put in place to ensure they aren't at risk of falls. This is hugely important, as having a fall will increase the risk of a hospital stay, which can be very confusing and distressing for a person with dementia.

Remember it's not a hotel

It's natural that you'll want the person to be in a pleasant environment but it's easy to place too much emphasis on aesthetics. Some care homes may pride themselves on offering residents an environment that resembles a hotel. But the most important thing in my view is the level of care the person is receiving, and the interaction they have with the care home staff.

Would you be comfortable being there? If you don't feel right being there then imagine how the person living there will feel. It's also got to be somewhere you feel comfortable visiting regularly, so that the person with dementia will get to see you regularly.

Practical considerations

Other important considerations include whether the home has wheelchair access as well as a lift, and whether the room is appropriate for the person with dementia. Some care homes have shared bathroom facilities and while this works for some, it may not suit everyone. Some residents would prefer to have their own bathroom.

It's also important to think about the facilities in and near to the care home. Is there a garden where residents can sit in warmer weather? Is there a nearby shop, restaurant, café or garden centre where you can take the

person fairly easily to break up their day?

Security is another important factor so that the person with dementia doesn't manage to leave the home and wander off, putting themselves at risk. Are the doors locked with special entry codes to gain access?

Visiting rights

Ask the home what their policy is on visits. Are you free to visit anytime during the day or evening? Are you free to make a drink for the person and yourself when you visit and made to feel welcome?

When the residents are tired, are they free to go to bed when they want? One care home I visited was under-staffed, and I once sat with a dozen tired residents at 10pm, who were so exhausted they'd fallen asleep in their chairs. They had given up asking to be taken to bed. The carers were busy putting other residents to bed, but there weren't enough carers on duty.

If you have found what you think is a suitable home, it's important to ask the manager if the person will have a full assessment of their needs. You may also be asked to fill in a document that describes the person including their family history and likes and dislikes. This is so that care staff can refer to it and use it to get to know the person better. Ask if each resident has a care plan and how often it gets reviewed.

If you are arranging a home privately, make sure that the home sends you a contract in advance. Read it and ask any questions first. Ask what the notice period is if things don't work out. Make sure you understand how the weekly fees are calculated and how much notice will be given if fees are increased. It's also worth asking what

MORE HELP. For more information on funding, visit:

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/Pages/funding-care.aspx>

happens if the person's condition deteriorates and whether the home would continue to be able to meet their needs. If not, what alternative arrangements would be made to move them to somewhere more suitable?

Try to find a home that can cope with the person's condition as they get worse. A nursing home may be a better option if you think the person is borderline between residential and nursing care. Think about not just what they are like now but how they are likely to be in six months or a year's time. It's difficult to predict the future but it's important to try to think ahead. If you can find a home that could cope with the person deteriorating, it saves moving them at a later date.



Come to The Alzheimer's Show and meet our experts in person!

The Alzheimer's Show takes place at London's Olympia on 5-6 June 2020 and brings the dementia community together under one roof, offering support, information and practical advice for families, carers and healthcare professionals. Come along and meet our team of experts, take part in practical workshops, ask Admiral Nurses for advice on coping with dementia and learn more about how you can best care for your loved ones.

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www.alzheimersshow.co.uk