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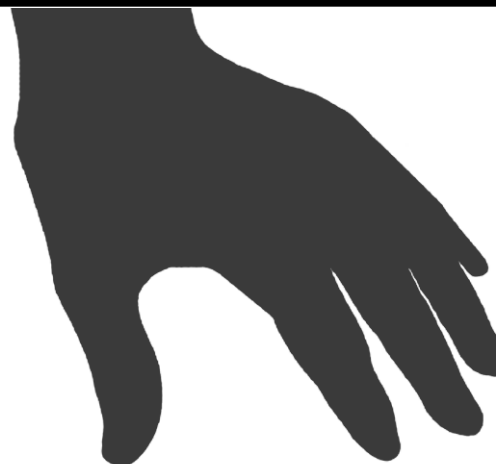
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Choosing a Dementia Special Care Unit

**How to find the
best facility for
a person with
Alzheimer's Disease
or a related dementia**

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The information in this guide has been adapted from the following sources:

“Standards and Survey Protocol for Dementia Special Care Units,” by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations; and

“The Consumer's Guide to Long-Term Care in Virginia,” by the Virginia Bureau of Insurance.

Steps To Take

If you are considering placing a relative or loved one who has Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia in a special care unit in one of Virginia's long-term care facilities, you will need to gather some basic information.

Special care units are a relatively new concept in the long-term care field. As a result, current care, licensure and certification standards for nursing homes and other facilities do not specifically address these programs. They also do not define the services that make them unique.

This means that you must rely on your own judgment when thinking about placing a relative or loved one into a special care unit. Please take a few minutes to read this book and give some serious consideration to the issues raised in the following paragraphs.

Visit More Than One Unit

Visiting several facilities will allow you to compare one unit with another. Seeing several units in operation will also help you better understand what kinds of services are included in specialized care for patients with Alzheimer's Disease and related dementias.

While visiting, use all your senses: sight, smell, hearing, etc. Be sensitive to the overall atmosphere of the unit. Watch the staff to see how they interact with residents.

Determine The Resident-to-Staff Ratio

Staff levels often depend upon the needs of the residents in the facility. However, it is generally accepted that the more staff personnel that are available to work with residents, the higher the quality of care will be. Ask how many staff members are on duty during each shift. Ideally, there should be a ratio of four to six residents to one staff person.

Get Written Documentation

Make sure that you get a written description of the services and programs offered by any special care unit, along with charges or fees associated with them. Other items you will need to get in writing include:

- A clear explanation of how the special care unit differs from the rest of the nursing home or assisted living facility;
- A description of the physical environment in the special care unit;
- A description of any specialized training the unit staff has received;
- A statement of the resident-to-staff ratio for each shift in the unit; and

Get Written Documentation - continued:

- A description of the level of personal care that your relative or loved one will receive.

Before moving someone into any special care unit, you should be confident that the higher price charged for care in the unit will actually result in their receiving better care.

Talk With Others

Talking with others is a good way to share your concerns while gathering information to help you make the best decision. The Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman and your local chapter of the Alzheimer's Association are resources you can contact for information on special care units.

Contact an ombudsman by calling the Virginia Department for the Aging toll-free **1-800-552-3402**. A list of Alzheimer's Association chapters can be found at the end of this book.

Questions To Ask

When you visit a special care unit, use the following questions to help you evaluate the unit's ability to meet the needs of your relative or loved one. You can then

use the information you have recorded to compare one unit to another.

Philosophy

1. Is the philosophy and mission of the special care unit stated in the written description of the unit?
2. Does the mission or goal of the unit (or specialized program) clearly state the benefits that your relative or loved one will receive if they are placed there? Can the unit staff tell you what is special about the care offered in the unit?
3. Do the other residents in the special care unit have capabilities similar to that of your relative or loved one?
4. Does the special care unit recognize and respect religious, ethnic and cultural considerations consistent with your loved one's background or beliefs?
5. Are advance health care directives (such as a durable health care power-of-attorney and a living will) reviewed and honored by the staff of the special care unit?
6. What are the unit's policies regarding entry and exit from the unit?

Philosophy - continued:

7. Will changes in your loved one's condition or abilities cause them to become ineligible to be in the special care unit?
8. Does the special care unit accept individuals who have late-stage dementia and/or a debilitating illness?

Care Plan

9. Will the special care unit include you when developing and/or reviewing a care plan that is customized to meet the needs of your loved one?
10. Will staff members with different skills (nurses, social workers, aides, etc.) work together as a team to develop the care plan?
11. Will the staff meet regularly to update the plan and make changes if necessary to meet your loved one's changing needs?
12. Will you be notified when changes are made to your loved one's care plan?
13. What are the unit's practices for addressing disruptive or difficult behavior in its residents?

Staff Members

14. Is the number of staff members on duty adequate to meet the needs of the unit's residents? Is the staff-to-resident ratio significantly better in the special care unit than in the rest of the nursing home or facility?
15. Does the special care unit's staffing plan allow for continuity of care by having the same staff members assigned to the same residents?
16. Is dementia-specific training required for all staff members of the special care unit?
17. Do staff members have the opportunity to attend workshops or training sessions to maintain or increase their skills?
18. Do you feel comfortable with the staff members and confident in their abilities?

Physical Environment

19. Is there a central or convenient living area where residents can interact with each other under the supervision of the staff?
20. Does the special care unit provide adequate safeguards to keep residents from wandering away?

Physical Environment - Continued:

21. Is the special care unit bright and cheerful? Does it have both natural sunlight and plenty of artificial lighting to keep the surroundings bright?
22. Does the special care unit provide opportunities for residents to engage in safe and secure exercise both inside and outside of the facility?
23. Are chairs arranged in the special care unit in ways that encourage the residents to interact with each other?
24. Does the special care unit have facilities and equipment to support familiar activities for residents like cooking, cleaning and gardening?
25. Does the special care unit encourage residents to bring furniture and other personal items from their homes for use in their rooms?
26. Is the environment in the unit calm and pleasurable?

Activities & Programs

27. Does the special care unit have an established routine that is consistent on a daily basis?

28. Does the unit offer varied activities for residents every day of the week? How do these activities differ from the activities offered to residents in the rest of the facility?
29. Does the unit offer some activities at night for residents who are unable to sleep?
30. Does the special care unit use various therapies (art therapy, music therapy, movement and exercise therapy, etc.) to involve and motivate its residents?
31. Are individual hobbies and interests accommodated and encouraged?
32. Are the current residents active and engaged in activities?

Use of Restraints

33. Does the special care unit use physical or chemical restraints?
34. If the unit uses restraints, under what conditions do they use them, and for how long?
35. Is a resident's family notified when restraints are used?

Overall Impression

36. Given that residents of the special care unit have dementia, do they appear engaged and content?
37. Is the atmosphere cheerful and "like home"?
38. Are the residents clean and well groomed?
39. Does the staff treat residents with dignity and respect?
40. Does there appear to be open communication between the residents, staff and family members?

Additional Resources

The following are additional resources that you can use if you need additional information or would like to talk to someone about choosing a dementia special care unit:

To reach a Long-Term Care Ombudsman, contact:

Virginia Department for the Aging
1610 Forest Avenue, Suite 100
Richmond, VA 23229
Toll-Free: 1-800-552-3402
(Nationwide Voice/TTY)
Phone: (804) 662-9333
Fax: (804) 662-9354
E-mail: aging@vda.virginia.gov
Web Site: www.vda.virginia.gov

Alzheimer's Association

- **Alzheimer's Association National Office**
225 North Michigan Avenue, 17th Floor
Chicago, IL 60601
Toll-Free: 1-800-272-3900 (Contact center is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)
Phone: (312) 335-8700
Fax: (312) 335-1110
E-mail: info@alz.org
Web Site: www.alz.org
- **Greater Richmond Chapter**
4600 Cox Road, Suite 130
Glen Allen, VA 23060
Toll-Free: 1-800-598-4673
Phone: (804) 967-2580
Fax: (804) 967-2588
Web Site: www.richmondalzheimers.org
- **Central and Western Virginia Chapter**
1807 Seminole Trail, Suite 204
Charlottesville, VA 22901
Toll-Free: 1-800-272-3900
Phone: (434) 973-6122
Fax: (434) 973-4224
Web Site: www.alzcvva.org

- **National Capital Area Chapter**

11240 Waples Mill Road, Suite 402

Fairfax, VA 22030

Toll-Free: 1-866-259-0042

Phone: (703) 359-4440

Fax: (703) 359-4441

Web Site: www.alz-nca.org

- **Northeast Tennessee Chapter**

207 N. Boone Street, Suite 1500

Johnson City, TN 37604

Toll-Free: 1-800-272-3900

Phone: (423) 928-4080

Fax : (423) 928-1152

- **Southeastern Virginia Chapter**

#20 Interstate Corporate Center, Suite 233

Norfolk, VA 23502

Toll-Free: 1-800-272-3900

Phone: (757) 459-2405

Fax: (757) 461-7902