

# QUESTIONS AND OBSERVATIONS FOR TOURING SENIOR COMMUNITIES



Use the margins to  
take notes!

**Trust your instincts!** Like buying a home, choosing a community is personal. When a loved one leaves their home moving to assisted living or memory care it can be overwhelming and sad. Too many families only look at the pretty places and the size of the apartment.

That does not play a part, BUT after 10 years of working in an assisted living memory care I can tell you **CARE is KING**. It is the most important thing for your loved one. Who helps them in the shower? Who helps them in the bathroom, getting dressed and toileting? There are beautiful new places that I would never allow my parents to live in. I also know places that are older, not as pretty, that have great care.

## OBSERVE

How does the community look from the outside? Are the grounds well cared for? Does it look welcoming? Observe the public areas: How does the community feel? Does it look clean?

One area that's not be vacuumed may be ok, but if the whole building has dirty floors that's a concern. A dirty public area might have an explanation, but if it's consistent throughout the community, I would look elsewhere.

*I was touring with a family and the carpet from a small alcove to the outside courtyard had debris, the client didn't like it, but it was explained that is where residents take out their dogs and it was vacuumed daily but hard to keep up with.*

## ASK & WATCH YOUR TOUR GUIDE

Ask questions, don't just assume. Ask about the current residents. Your tour guide should be generally familiar with the community's residents and what they are like.

You can find out if the community is a cultural fit as well as to see what kind of relationship the staff and residents have. If your tour guide knows everyone's name and what they're up to, it's a good sign they genuinely care about their residents. A good tour guide will introduce you to residents and caregivers as you walk the building.



Try to schedule the tour at a time when residents are doing activities or lunch. (When I was planning a tour, I often invited the family for lunch and or activity. That is a wonderful way to taste the food and have the potential resident meet new people.)

## QUESTIONS ABOUT STAFFING

- What is the staff to resident ratio during peak hours and during night hours?
- Does the community use temporary workers from an agency? If so, occasionally, or on a regular basis?
- Are nurses available 24/7?
- What kind of training do the caregivers have?
- Who supervises the caregivers?
- Who dispenses medications?
- How are background checks performed for new employees?
- How long have the Director and Nurse been in their roles?
- Are there any long-term employees? Loyal staff can indicate a healthy community.
- Do they have a visiting physician, PA or NP coming to the community to see residents?

## COSTS

Get a full picture of the costs: This is a given but be sure to cover your bases when talking about the costs of the community. The majority of communities are private pay. Most communities accept Long Term Care Insurance and Veterans Benefits, so confirm with the community.

- Ask about the payment model. Is it a base price plus care plan fee or is it an all-inclusive?
- Get a written quote for the month-to-month costs.
- What is included in the Base price? (The usual services in base price include 3 meals a day, activities, use of the public areas, group events. Ask about personal laundry and housekeeping. They are not always included in the base price.)
- Ask about yearly increases in rent.
- Is there a deposit and entry fee?

## CARE

Most communities will have a care plan for each resident. The care plan should be completed after the move in assessment and prior to moving in. You should be able to ask for a copy of the care plan and have the nurse go over it with you prior to moving in. If your loved one has dementia and is unable to use a pendant or pull cord to ask for help, they should have a process in place to check on them periodically.

- How does the community know how to care for your loved one?
- Care is the number one priority and that should be evident when you discuss your loved one and their specific care needs.
- What happens when the care needs increase. Is there a level of care that would be too high for the resident to stay in community?

## MEALS, ACTIVITIES AND MISC.

- What kind of meals are offered and are there options?
- Can special diets be accommodated?
- What does the kitchen look like? (Look for cleanliness) If your family is particular about the food, you might ask to meet the kitchen manager/cook/chef and see
- Can residents invite guests for a meal and if so, what is the cost?
- Do they have someone specifically hired for activities?
- Ask for an activities calendar.
- Do they have a bus to take residents out for activities? If they do have a bus, will they take residents to appointments and if so, do they charge for that service?
- Is there a community medical alert system with pendants and pull cords that your loved one can utilize to alert staff of their needs?
- Are pets welcome and is there an additional charge or deposit if they live with the resident?
- Are visiting pets welcome?
- Ask what makes them different: Every assisted living community provides care, and once you've established that they provide great care it can be telling to ask what makes them special.

*The assisted living memory care community I worked in had a secured assisted living which allowed us to have dementia residents in our assisted living that other communities would have put in their memory care. It made us special and unique.*

Cheryl Harris

Your Senior Living Family Advocate

charris@seniorlivingfamilyadvocate.com

(269) 207-1720