

Questions to Ask When Considering a Memory Care Community

Let's say you've been taking care of your loved one with dementia and their care needs have exceeded your skills or your health is being affected or it's just time for a change in the care plan. You've also lost your relationship with them because of your role as caregiver. You want that back. You start looking at memory care communities but you're not sure what to look for or what to ask.

Care for individuals with dementia and Alzheimer's can range from Assisted Living to Memory Care to Specialized Memory Care.

Using a local placement agency who facilitates care community selection and visits is usually a free service. These companies/individuals get paid by the care communities for placement and as locals, know more about which communities are best for specific needs.

- **Who's running the place?** You'll most likely tour with the community's marketing and sales director. You should talk with the Executive Director about how you engage as a family member, how are issues resolved, training and certifications, and any other questions you have.
- **How big or small?** Number of resident rooms, the size of the resident room, private or companion rooms, number of dining rooms, large enough activity spaces indoors and outdoors.
- **What type of medical care is available?** Most memory care communities have at least 1 RN or LPN on the floor 24/7. Speak to the nurse and the medical director before choosing a community.
- **What's the Caregiver training and ratio?** This is the number of residents each caregiver must provide care for. One caregiver to 6- 8 residents is a reasonable care load for memory care. Ask this question when you meet with the

Executive Director of the community. You'll also be able to observe this as you walk around the community. Ask about caregiver dementia training and if you'd like, ask to see the curriculum

- **What's to Eat?** Yes, food is factor. How clean is the kitchen, the table linens, the floors in the dining room? Meet the registered dietician who plans the meals and ask about their methodology for creating meals. Ask if there's a backup plan if your loved one doesn't like a particular meal. Most communities always offer sandwiches or some other "palatable" option to the hot meal.
- **What types of stimulation are available and how often?** Do they have specific areas to accommodate higher-functioning and lower-functioning individuals? How much time do residents spend in their rooms? I favor there being no TV in the resident's rooms because it requires the resident to engage and be around others.

NOTE:

As Alzheimer's or dementia progresses, your loved one will need to move to progressively higher levels of care. Minimal moving is ideal and the best situation is when the person with memory issues can stay in one room throughout the course of their journey.

- **Thought about a Companion Room?** If a private room is not available or if budget is a concern, a companion room is a great option. The community director will match the information of your loved one with another resident and they'll observe the compatibility. They want your loved one to be happy. My mom had a private room and it always felt empty. Then I switched her to a companion room and both women seemed happier.
- **Are they regulated?** Regulation varies by state, not community by community, so be sure you Google search your states for "{state name} memory care facilities regulations" or something similar.

- **How far is the drive?** Consider how far a distance you, family members and friends will have to drive to visit your loved one.

There Could Be a Waiting List

Be sure to ask if there is a waiting list. Unfortunately, waiting lists are common, especially at the best communities. When they're at capacity, you have to wait for someone to move out.

To me, this is the KEY reason for starting your search when symptoms are just showing up. You can get on waiting lists and then pass if you're not ready. Find out if there are any consequences to passing.

Finances

Many people sell their home and use the profits from that to pay for memory care. Medicaid can help with expenses if your loved one qualifies. Ask the community if they accept payments from Medicaid. Medicare does not pay living expenses, only medical expenses.

Conclusion

A side benefit to selecting the right community is the amount of *relief you feel* because you know your loved one is being well-cared for and encouraged to engage in a way that's comfortable for them. They are being cared for by professionals who are experienced in dementia behaviors. Most family members feel some level of "guilt" for not inviting their loved one into their homes. Knowing that they're getting better care than you can provide makes that guilt sting a lot less. Now, you can have back your relationship with your loved one.