

## **What to Look for When Considering Facility Care**

There are many important components to a decision about choosing the right care facility for your loved one. The best way to evaluate a facility is to visit, look around and talk with the people there. Often you will start with a tour of the unit or facility with a staff member. Don't hesitate to ask questions as you move about. If you can, plan a second visit too, either during a meal time or on an evening or weekend to see the facility during non-peak staff times also.

### **Physical environment**

- What is the location like? Is it near a busy intersection in the center of town or set apart in a quieter area?
- Is the environment inside pleasant? Is it clean? Does the facility smell of urine? Are the hallways cluttered with unnecessary equipment?
- Can you bring in personal items and even furniture to help residents feel comfortable?
- Does the design of the unit help people with cognitive losses or add to confusion? Are there cues such as color coded rooms to assist with room finding, reduced reflections or shadows that impede walking,
- What arrangements are there for safe indoor and outdoor walking areas?
- Watch and listen for call lights to see if they are answered as you walk about.
- Does the dining room facilitate calm mealtimes or is there a large noisy dining room? Does the food look appetizing?
- Are the residents out of bed and dressed? Are they engaged and active beyond TV? Are there visitors present?
- Does the place seem overly noisy?

## **Staffing and programs**

- Is staff attentive to residents' needs and respectful in their interaction? Are they engaged with the residents? Do they speak to the residents or simply walk by them?
- Does staff seem very hurried and stressed? Do they say hello to you and others as you walk about? Do they seem friendly?
- Has the administrator been in their position for a while and does the administrator share the facility's philosophy of care with you? The tone is generally set at the top so frequent administrator turnover is difficult.
- Do you feel comfortable with the administrator? The director of nursing? Do you feel you could bring concerns to these people? If you ask about something you notice (e.g., why residents aren't dressed) listen closely to the answer. Does the answer satisfy you?
- Do they have a special unit for people with dementia? What type of dementia-specific training does the facility have and who receives the training?
- How does staff approach assistance at mealtimes? Is sufficient help available for someone with special nutritional needs?
- Ask about daily activities and how many residents attend the activities. Are activities required? Many people with FTD have trouble engaging with a group; what alternatives are available?
- What type of special communication techniques are used by the staff with residents who have dementia?
- How are residents assisted with activities of daily living? How frequently do people have showers?
- What medical care is available in-house? Is a geriatric psychiatrist with experience in dementia care affiliated with a Special Care Unit? Who evaluates the use of psychoactive medications?
- Does the facility provide palliative care when necessary?

## **Policies**

- Does the facility have a resident's or family council? If so ask to see the minutes of the last meeting to see what issues were brought up by residents.
- Ask to see the Statement of Deficiencies and Plan of Correction. This is a federal survey that is usually posted in plain site near the main entrance. This information is what is frequently reported on the web.
- Ask the administrator to explain any deficiency you saw. Has it been corrected? What steps have been taken to make sure it won't happen again?
- What are the facility's policies on visiting? Can family visit during the initial transition? This can be helpful for someone with FTD. Are there any limitations on regular access for visiting?
- What are the policies related to transfer and/or the discharge from the Alzheimer care unit? What happens if a resident is considered inappropriate for the unit?
- What happens when a private pay resident becomes Medicaid eligible?
- Can the person continue under their current physician's care? How is care coordinated with neurologists or others familiar with the patient?
- How are decisions about medication changes and PRN medications made?

## **Specific to Frontotemporal Degeneration**

- What knowledge or experience do the administrator, director of nursing, and direct care staff have working with people with FTD? Was their experience positive or negative? Is he or she open to learning more?
- Does the administrator show empathy or understanding of the unique challenges you and the patient face in finding appropriate care?
- Is there recognition of the value of your experience as the main caregiver that would lay the groundwork for a good partnership?
- How does the staff address behavior issues? Be honest about why you are seeking facility placement. If behavioral concerns increase the need for 24 hour supervision, explain the need in factual rather than emotionally charged terms and ask how the staff would approach those behaviors. Be sure to give positive information about the person as well to provide the full picture.
- Does the facility have consistent staffing or do they rotate staff?