

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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UT SOUTHWESTERN GERONTOLOGIST OFFERS WAYS TO FIND THE RIGHT NURSING HOME

DALLAS – April 25, 2002 – A recent study conducted by the Department of Health and Human Services found that nine out of 10 nursing homes in the United States lacked adequate staffing to properly care for patients.

Such findings may alarm Americans, but a gerontology specialist at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas said consumers who conduct research on prospective facilities and discuss all options with family members can find an appropriate nursing home for themselves or loved ones.

“Nursing homes are not suitable for everyone,” said Dr. Kevan Namazi, chairman of gerontology at Southwestern Allied Health Sciences School. “It is important to have an earnest discussion about options – from medical needs to the level of assistance required – with the person who is considering living in a nursing home. Involving him or her in the decision-making process can help ease anxiety during this transitional period.”

According to the Administration on Aging, 5 percent of Americans 65 or older live in the nation’s more than 17,500 nursing homes.

“With so many choices available, knowing which facility to pick can be overwhelming,” Namazi said. “Knowing what questions to ask and what to look for can help streamline the process.”

Such questions might include: Is the facility located near your home? Has it been cited for any violations? If so, how often? Does the facility offer special care for patients who have physical disabilities or suffer from Alzheimer’s disease or other forms of dementia? Does the facility encourage impromptu family visits and offer lengthy visiting hours and a variety of recreational activities? What is the ratio of staff members to residents during the afternoon and overnight? For optimal supervision, there should be one staff member for every five to six residents.

(MORE)

NURSING HOME - 2

Once consumers have done as much preliminary research as possible, they should visit each prospective facility.

If the facility has an odor or looks unkempt, or if some residents appear to have been unattended, walk out, Namazi said.

“This means that residents are not being properly taken care of,” he said.

Namazi also suggested people talk to the staff and residents and visit the facility at different hours of the day and night when checking out nursing homes.

Valuable resources about nursing homes also can be found on the Internet or in books, Namazi said. A Medicare site that compares nursing homes can be found at www.medicare.gov/NHCompare/home.asp. Or you can call 800-442-2620 for more information.

The Texas Department of Human Services site offers nursing home consumer information at www.dhs.state.tx.us/nhconsumer.html, or you can call 888-834-7406. Additional consumer information on how to choose a nursing home can be found at www.dhs.state.tx.us/programs/ltc/consumer.html.

The Texas Advocates for Nursing Home Residents have a Web site at www.tanhr.org. You also can call the organization at 888-826-4748.

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