



Consumer Awareness Guide Finding the Best Senior Living Facility

Avoid the 6 Most Common Pitfalls When Choosing a Senior Living Facility

Facing the reality of senior care options for yourself or your loved one can be a confusing and overwhelming task. At this crucial time in family life, you need a guide. All assisted living facilities are not created equal, and the secret is to know what to look for and what questions to ask. This report uncovers the secrets you need to know before making a decision and will act as your guide as you walk through this process.

The process of deciding on a senior care option can be very stressful and statistics show that many families often wait two years too long before making a decision. Often a fall or serious medical condition initiates a rushed and stressed process of finding the appropriate care option for a loved one. This report will give you the tools to make the right decision whether you are being proactive or under the pressure of a time sensitive decision.

You can avoid the 6 most common pitfalls people make when choosing a senior living facility. We also offer a free consultation or someone to talk to if you visit www.frontidacare.com or call 262.925.9302 and reference this consumer report.

The 6 Most Common Pitfalls When Choosing a Senior Living Facility

Pitfall #1: Misleading pricing and hidden fees

Price is a major concern when finding a senior care option. However, finding the real price is not as simple as it may seem. Facilities will show you an initial low rate to avoid the “sticker shock” and then encourage you to come tour. Your tour guide will then show you their amazing activities, planned outings, transportation options, special meals, special clubs, medication management services, housekeeping services, and spa options. However, be careful, these are all extra fees and very quickly you will feel like your loved one deserves or needs all of the services, and the prices will escalate very quickly.

Bottom Line: You have to ask what’s included in the price you are being quoted, and how much the extras actually cost.

There is a benefit to charging residents only for things they want to do. However, the danger is that you would choose a facility based on a low price, only to later discover that it isn’t affordable because of the additional cost of the services you desire.

Pitfall #2: Believing that your loved one can stay forever

In a perfect world you would make this senior care decision once and then never have to face it again. The reality is that there are two main factors that can cause your loved one to be forced to move again, and they are: money and care needs. Many facilities will admit your loved one because you have the resources to pay the monthly fee. However, when the resources run out, **they will ask you to move**. There may be a public pay option available (Medicaid or state pay), but the facility may not accept it, and may force you to move to a facility that accepts “public pay.” This type of move can be very traumatic for your loved one because they now have friends, a routine, and a comfort

level where they are living. This is becoming an industry standard practice, and you must be aware.

What can you do? Ask the question during the tour, “*What happens when our money runs out?*” “Can we stay here, and will you accept a “public pay” option?” You can also ask them to put it into writing.

The second reason your loved one may be asked to move is because their care needs have changed. Facilities are very different in the amount of care they can and will provide. Some facilities will ask you to move if your loved one develops challenging behavior, incontinence, multiple medications, or they become unable to walk or transfer on their own. You can ask questions such as: What if my loved one develops challenging behavior? What if they become wheelchair bound? Sometimes a move because of changing care needs, such as behaviors, medical conditions, and mobility is a great thing; however, the behind-the-scene knowledge is that, as care needs increase, so does the cost to care for that resident. If you are touring a facility and you don't see challenging behavior or high care needs, it may mean that they don't keep anyone that develops those.

Bottom Line: Be aware that finances and care needs are the main drivers that will force another move for your loved one. You can ask questions and get things in writing.

Pitfall #3: Beautiful buildings

Your loved one needs to leave their home and move to a facility. We recognize this can be a very painful and emotional process for everyone involved. Often the family members feel guilty about the move and want to overcome this guilt by placing their loved one in a beautiful facility with lots of amenities. Be aware that developers build these facilities to appeal to the family members and not the person that will actually be living in the facility. Many of the pools, bars, exercise rooms, and attractive entrances are not used by the residents. These amenities are appeal to family members and not what the residents actually need.

Bottom Line: Don't be fooled by big beautiful buildings and amenities. Know what your loved one actually needs and what amenities they will actually use. Many older and smaller facilities offer more focused care at a very affordable price.

There is a benefit to new properties that are specifically designed for seniors. The danger is in choosing a property based on amenities that are not practical for your loved one.

Pitfall #4: Only talking to your tour guide

You will likely tour several properties before making your decision. You will be greeted by a friendly and knowledgeable sales person that will take you on a tour of the property showing you the rooms and areas they want you to see. Be aware that you will likely never talk to this sales person again, and they will not be providing care to your loved one. To get a better assessment of the property and its staff, you can ask to talk to the manager, the cook, the housekeeper, the caregivers, and some of the residents. You can ask to see more resident rooms, the kitchen, the storage closets, the basement, and the medication area. Think of it this way: when you tour a residential home with a real estate agent, you will look through the entire home and ask lots of questions. Treat this process the same: ask lots of questions and leave no stone unturned.

Bottom Line: The tour guide is typically a sales person and will not be providing the care. They will also show you what they want you to see. Remember that you are in control of the tour.

Pitfall #5: Information Overload

The learning curve is steep when you are facing a senior care decision. In Wisconsin there are many acronyms (CBRF, RCAC, SNF, ADRC), and the temptation can be to not ask clarifying questions about what all of the terms mean because you may feel embarrassed. Take your time and understand the different terms. Most of the brochures and flyers will never be looked at again. Instead, take notes about your feelings, thoughts, questions, and concerns. A good guide will not only be concerned about you coming to their facility, but they will help you find the right place.

Bottom Line: Keep asking clarifying questions. You don't have to become an expert in all things senior care, but you need to understand enough to make an informed decision.

Pitfall #6: Assuming that activities are meaningful

B16! BINGO! Yes, everyone likes a game of Bingo now and then, but every day? In Wisconsin by law each home has to post an activity calendar complete with the date, time, and activities that will be taking place. Look for this calendar! However, also look to see if the activities are taking place when they are scheduled. Also, make sure the activity listed is actually being done. It is not uncommon to have really exciting activities listed on the calendar, but the reality is that they don't happen. Take note when an activity is scheduled and come back for an impromptu visit to make sure it is happening. The calendar may say "watercolor painting class," and it is actually a children's coloring sheet and a set of crayons.

Many facilities will have a great full-time activities person hired. This is a plus and often means the activities will be more regular and meaningful. However, what happens on the weekend? Do activities happen? Or are they short staffed with no manager on duty? Plan a visit on a Saturday or Sunday to see what the weekends are actually like.

Bottom Line: What activities are planned and what takes place are two different things. **You will get what you inspect, not what you expect.** Be diligent in this category, ask lots of questions and verify it. A healthy and appropriate activity program can make your loved one's experience so different.

Finally, Senior Care is business, you are the customer, and facilities will put their best foot forward to win your business. There are several ways to "look under the hood." First, ask to read any recent surveys (government inspections). Facilities may have perfect surveys, but some citations are normal. You should be concerned about citations that involve poor resident care, improper staffing levels, food safety issues, and cleanliness. If the facility has been given a "no admit order," there is reason for you to be very concerned. Second, read online reviews of the facility. The facilities' websites may have some reviews, but they will only post their best reviews. Search Google, Facebook, Bing, Yelp, Yahoo or just enter the facilities' names in a search engine and read their outside reviews. Third, trust your instincts and ask a lot of questions.

There are great facilities available in the midst of many average and poor facilities. Be an informed consumer.

If you would like help in making a decision for your loved one, please contact us. We own and operate assisted living homes in Wisconsin. Our homes may not be appropriate for your loved one, but we can help you find the right home. We believe that by freely helping others our business will take care of itself.

If you would like a free consultation or someone to talk to, visit us at www.frontidacare.com or call 262.925.9302 and reference this consumer guide.