

“How to Choose a Care Home”

Choosing the right care home is a crucially important decision that can affect the quality of life of you or your loved one for years to come.

So, how do you find a good one?

Below you will find the secrets to choosing a good home. Using this guide can save you lots of wasted time, effort and money. More importantly it can help you find a home where you will be happy, safe, cherished and contented and avoid ending up miserable and poorly cared for just when you need it most.

So, the first thing you need to know is:

1. Who to trust?

For a fully independent and professional view of how well a care home does its job, read its report on the Care Quality Commission web site (www.cqc.org.uk).

This is an independent government body that regulates and inspects every care home in the country. Recently CQC has introduced a star rating system rather like that used in hotels to make it easier to find the best ones. The higher the rating the better the home is.

The range is from 0 stars to 3 stars. 3 stars is the highest possible rating a home can get and it needs to be excellent to achieve this. So when you are looking at a home, start with 3 star homes.

If a home has 2 stars it may still be good, though you need to look closely at its CSCI report to see why it was down graded.

Next you need to:

2. Decide what you want and what's important to you before you start looking

- Are you independent, mobile and socially active? Or do you need a high degree of support and care?
- Are you fiercely private or enjoy being with others?

- Do you want a single room or double?
- Do you want an en-suite?
- Do you want to be near family or friends?
- Do you want to be in the countryside or in the middle of a city?
- What facilities might you want the home to provide? Hairdressing, chiropody or going out for example
- Do you have any special dietary requirements or like certain foods
- Do you want/need a TV and telephone in your room or are you happy with communal ones?
- Do you want to use your own furniture or bring a pet?
- What sort of budget do you have? Will you be paying for the care privately or be funded by the local authority?

It's important to have a clear idea of exactly what you want, so make a list of key things that you need before you start looking for suitable homes. This will save a lot of time and help you to quickly identify homes that are unsuitable.

Here's what to do next...

3. Where to find homes

Once you know exactly what type of things you are looking for in a home it becomes much easier to compile a short list. So now its time to see what's available that meets your needs.

Firstly ask people who have relatives in homes or who visit them. Family, friends or health professionals who actually visit homes will be able to give you accurate first hand impressions.

Make sure you tell them what you are looking for first though so they don't waste time recommending a home that doesn't match your needs.

Next look in your local paper. They often have a monthly focus on care where homes in the area advertise.

Your local council or branch of age concern. Another good source of homes in your area.

Finally, the internet. If you have internet access this is the best place to find homes as almost all of them will be listed, even if they don't have their own web site.

Try to be specific with your search. If you search for 'care homes' you'll get **1,760,000,000** results, which will make finding the home for you a bit difficult! If you want a home in the Harrogate area, for example 'Residential Care Home in Harrogate' will produce much more focussed results.

Visit the web site of the homes you like. They will usually have a picture of the home and its facilities on it and a list of what they provide. Read the words on the site. Do they talk about you and your needs? Do they seem to have their residents' best interests at heart? If not, move on. Research done?

Now it's time..... to take some action

4. Time to Use Your Gut Instincts

Once you have a list of homes you think may be suitable, it's almost time to go and visit them. Before you do, here's another time tip that can save a lot of time with wasted visits.

Phone the home before you visit. This is really important because the response you get speaks volumes about it. Use your gut instinct to assess the home. If something just doesn't feel right, it usually isn't.

Here's some pointers to look out for:

- Takes an age for someone to answer – probably understaffed.
- Person doesn't speak your language – how will they communicate effectively with you or your loved one? (Incidentally, this is a practical matter not a race issue. If Chinese is your first language you need a home where Chinese is freely spoken.)
- Do they ask you lots of questions about you and your requirements – Their primary concern should be in finding out whether they can provide what you want and need
- Are they warm and welcoming or cold and uninterested – poorly motivated staff aren't likely to provide top quality care. This is a major red flag
- Do they freely invite you to visit anytime or by appointment only. This is a tricky one as making an appointment *is* a professional thing to do. The home can make sure there is someone ready and waiting to take you round, which is very respectful of your time. However, if they seem reluctant to let you visit without an appointment you have to wonder why.
- See what follow up you get after the call. Most well run homes will send you a follow up letter or brochure and perhaps call you back after a few days to see if they can be of further assistance. Be reassured by this. If they are this organised it's likely that the care they provide will be similarly first rate.

Next, possibly the most important bit.

5. The Acid Test

Once you have your, by now, very short, shortlist of possible homes its time to visit. So, do you make an appointment or arrive unannounced?

Well, if you were encouraged to visit anytime when you phoned up, it's safe to make an appointment and this is most respectful of everyone's time.

However, if there was any reluctance to visiting anytime, make sure you *do* arrive unannounced. This way you will get a true picture of how the home is really run.

So what should you look for when you arrive?

Here's some check points:

1. Tidy well kept frontage of the grounds and building
2. Warm, welcoming & courteous greeting
3. Clean, tidy and sweet smelling interior
4. Plenty of staff around
5. Private area to discuss your requirements
6. Lots of questions to find out all your requirements
7. Clear answers to all your own questions
8. Clean, tidy well presented rooms
9. Clean, tidy toilets and bathing areas

Don't rush. Take your time. Speak to several members of staff and ask several existing residents what they think of the place. Observe how members of staff are with the residents. Is this how you would want yourself or your loved one to be treated?

Ask detailed questions about your life here. For example, what arrangements can be made to see your own GP .

Lastly, find out about the fees. What exactly is included and what's not? How often are fees due and what methods of payment are open to you?

And finally....

6. The moment of truth

Once you have decided on the home you feel is right for you or your loved one it's time to make a commitment. This is a big decision so, before you finally sign on the dotted line, spend at least one day and night at the home to see if there is anything you missed or are really not comfortable with.

If there is don't be afraid to say so. Your happiness is at stake and you need to be really sure you feel comfortable with your new home.

If all goes well arrange to move in permanently. However, make this subject to an initial trial period of a couple of weeks where you can still change your mind with no financial consequences, just to be sure.

What to do next

We recommend you print out this report and keep it with you as a guide when searching for a care home. We sincerely hope that it helps you to find the right home for you or your loved one.

It was brought to you by Blackrod House Residential Care Home, which is conveniently located in central Lancashire with easy access to Bolton, Wigan and Chorley.

For more information please visit www.blackrodhouse.com, telephone 01204 690287 or contact the home directly at the address below.

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