

Protect Your Loved Ones from Nursing Home Neglect

The five-star rating system for nursing-home quality is far from perfect. Even high-ranking facilities had appalling instances of neglect and abuse, according to a recent exposé in *The New York Times*. The pandemic has likely made things worse, exacerbating existing staffing problems and, thanks to social-distancing rules, making oversight nearly impossible. *When choosing a home for a loved one...*

Talk to residents and their families about their experiences and, to the extent allowed, conduct a “secret-shopper”-style investigation. Are there opportunities for fresh air, socializing, and exercising mind and body? Unpleasant smells? If your loved one has any special needs, such as dementia, ask if the staff has specialized training. Once you’ve chosen a home...

Visit frequently, sometimes unannounced and during off hours. *If in-person is impossible:* Make generous use of video calling, keeping an eye on the background and listening to how the staff speaks to your loved one.

Ask staff members how you can ease their burden. Approach them with openness and cooperation. In-the-trenches nursing home work is demanding yet poorly compensated. Lots of positive communication goes a long way toward making sure your loved one gets the attention he/she needs.

Get to know the director of nursing. He/she is supposed to notify you when there is a change in your loved one’s treatment, including medications, and when there is a need for evaluation.

Create a care plan for your loved one. Each resident should have a

personalized care plan, with goals and preferences—even things as simple as, “Don’t park Mom in front of *Jeopardy!*—she hates that show.” The plan should be updated periodically.

If you spot true abuse or neglect: Gather as much information about the incident as you can, and contact the facility’s long-term-care ombudsman or your nearest Area Agency on Aging to file a detailed complaint. The name and contact information for the ombudsman, an unbiased third party who does not work for the facility, must be provided to loved ones as well as publicly posted at the facility.

Bottom Line Personal interviewed Annette Ticoras, MD, founder and patient advocate, Guided Patient Services, Inc., Columbus, Ohio. GPSColumbus.com

