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Internet Resources Related to Nursing Care Facilities

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ON-LINE

Internet Resources Related to Nursing Care Facilities

*Letting the ever-expanding
Internet cut legwork down
to deskwork in the process
of finding and evaluating
nursing home care
providers may reap a
wider variety of options
with less difficult, time-
consuming work.*

By Robin C. Schard

My mother is not generally big on guilt, but there is one area in which she surpasses all others. She has convinced my sisters and I that if we ever put her in a nursing home she will haunt us for the rest of our lives. As a result, I often found myself looking over my shoulder when searching the Internet for information on nursing facilities even though I live more than 1,000 miles from my parents. Obviously, despite my mother's predictions, there are many occasions when a nursing home provides the appropriate care for a person either on a temporary or a continuing basis. Many sites on the Internet provide information to assist consumers in deciding when a nursing home is the best solution, evaluating nursing homes, and matching the facility to the specific needs of the resident.

Medicare

<http://www.medicare.gov>

In my last column, I mentioned

Nursing Home Compare (<http://www.medicare.gov/NHCompare/Home.asp>) sponsored by Medicare. Nursing Home Compare aids in the selection and evaluation of potential facilities by providing information, such as contact information and state inspection results for Medicare- and Medicaid-certified nursing homes. The Medicare site, however, also presents other valuable consumer information. Within the section on nursing homes, this site has an in-depth checklist of questions to consider when choosing a nursing home, ranging from nutrition to safety. Other useful information in the nursing home section includes a brief discussion of alternatives to nursing care facilities, financial assistance available, a frequently asked questions (FAQ) area, and Internet links to other related resources. This section of Medicare's website also contains brochures and pamphlets, such as the "Guide to Choosing a Nursing Home" and "Medicare Appeals and Grievances."

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Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO)

<http://www.jcaho.org>

JCAHO is an independent agency that evaluates many types of health care services, including hospitals, long-term care facilities, and ambulatory services. Quality Check allows the user to discover which organizations have been accredited by JCAHO and to view summary information from the last accreditation. For example, the researcher can choose the type of organization, such as long-term care, and narrow the results by geographical area—state, city, or county. Quality Check displays the facilities matching those criteria. For each facility, Quality Check gives contact information, the date of the last accreditation, and the results. The results can vary from “accreditation with commendation” to “not accredited,” although the most common result seems to be “accreditation with recommendations for improvement.” The most recent performance report is available for many of the organizations. The performance report does not give much information on the facility but does rank its performance in a number of categories, such as Residents Rights, Availability of Resident-Specific Information, and Medication Use. The report also includes any specific recommendations for improvement. The main drawbacks to the accreditation reports are that they can be up to three years old and they only provide summary data—no real analysis is included. Within the General Public

section, the JCAHO website also provides a short checklist of relevant issues when considering a long-term care facility and a form to report complaints about healthcare to JCAHO.

Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program

<http://www.aoa.dhhs.gov/lcombudsman>

Another good source of information on nursing homes in your area is the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program. Since the Ombudsman Program receives and investigates complaints against long-term care providers, this office should be familiar with institutions throughout the state. The State Ombudsman Program is an excellent resource for information about how to find a facility and what to do to get quality care. The website is part of the Administration on Aging's website. It includes a Fact Sheet briefly describing the program, resident's rights, and Ombudsmen responsibilities; annual reports for 1995, 1996, and 1997 on the number and type of complaints handled by Ombudsmen; sections of the United States Code related to this program; and a link to the summary of a report prepared by the Institute of Medicine evaluating the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program. This site also has a directory of the State Ombudsman offices, listing contact information for every state, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

Mr. Long-Term Care

<http://www.mr-longtermcare.com>

Okay, I was a little skeptical about the name myself, but this slick site is a fantastic first stop for information related to long-term care. According to the website, the publisher, Martin K. Bayne, became involved in the status of long-term care when he was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. In addition to news and interviews related to long-term care, the site includes information on health issues, such as heart diseases and depression. In my consideration, however, the most valuable aspect of this page is the Links Village. Mr. Long-Term Care divides Internet links into five categories: Disability, Aging, Caregiving, Long-Term Care, and Village Square. Each section provides an impressive catalog of links related to the topic. For example, the Aging category has links for governmental websites, hospitals, Baby Boomers, and more. The Long-Term Care portion has links to websites that provide information on long-term care insurance, financing long-term care, and evaluating this type of facility. The mere collection of these links makes Mr. Long-Term Care's website a valuable starting point, even without the additional material he publishes here.

American Health Care Association

<http://www.ahca.org>

There are two sections of interest on this website for those researching long-term care and

nursing homes. The first section is the Long Term Care News, which provides daily news items related to the subject; selected articles from PROVIDER, a magazine for long-term care professionals; as well as legislative and regulatory updates. The second interesting section is Consumer Information. In addition to an article describing nursing home care, this portion also contains several detailed brochures on other related topics. There is a general pamphlet on nursing home facilities that covers issues such as the types of personal and medical services provided, the way to select a facility, paying for the care, the type of personnel who work in nursing homes, and a checklist for use in evaluating a facility. Other brochures cover issues for the family of one entering a nursing home, long-term care insurance, and other financial and medical considerations.

SeniorHousing Net

<http://www.seniorhousing.net>

Affiliated with Rent.Net, which is a listing service for rental properties, SeniorHousing Net lists, by state and city, different types of senior facilities, such as assisted living, independent living, or nursing homes. Obviously, as a marketing tool, the facilities will be shown in their best light. Other parts of the site, however, do provide some useful information. SeniorHousing Net contains a glossary of terms, short descriptions of payment options, and a basic checklist on evaluating different living situations. The best place to begin on this site is with

the Assessment Tool. This brief questionnaire allows the respondent to match the correct type of housing to his or her needs. Although the questionnaire is too simple to really decide what type of facility to choose, it does provide a working frame of reference for further decision-making.

Federal Consumer Information Center

<http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov>

Talk about technological innovation, you no longer need to send a dollar to Pueblo, Colorado, for the catalog because the Federal Consumer Information Center has many of its publications available on the Internet. "A Guide to Choosing a Nursing Home" is certainly worth a glance. This pamphlet follows the step-by-step process of choosing a nursing care facility, as well as covering some issues arising after admittance into a facility. (An older version of this pamphlet is also available on the Medicare website.)

AARP

<http://www.aarp.org>

The AARP website is always an excellent starting point for material related to older persons, and the same holds true for nursing care facility information. The material on this type of facility can be found within the Health and Wellness section. This portion includes practical tips on resident's rights, selecting a nursing home, and how to deal with problems. Also included on this page is an article describing the issues to consider when looking

at a nursing home admission contract. Although the site discusses the Nursing Home Reform Act in a general way, it provides no citations to the actual law. Of related interest, the Health and Wellness section has information on long-term care insurance, Medicare, and caregiving.

Seniors-Site.com

<http://www.seniors-site.com>

Seniors-Site.com seems to feature their message boards most prominently on the website. (Message boards allow anyone to post and/or respond to a message. They generally have the same reliability as message boards posted in your local grocery store.) From the site map, however, the researcher can find more information related to older persons, including topics such as "Sex & Seniors" and "Sports, Exercise & Fitness." The Nursing Homes section contains material on choosing and evaluating nursing homes, and it has a list of resident's rights and suggestions on handling problems in nursing homes. The information is designed for both nursing home residents and their families. For example, there is also an article on visiting someone in a nursing home.

Age Net

<http://www.agenet.com>

In addition to basic medical, legal, and financial information, Age Net has information on different types of living situations located in a section called Housing/Living Alternatives. For instance, there are articles on

reverse mortgages, various checklists, and the Medicare consumer pamphlet on selecting a nursing home (listed above in the Federal Consumer Information Center). This part of the website also provides a housing search in cooperation with Senior Alternatives for Living. The researcher can receive a guidebook on housing for free (after providing some personal information that the site claims will be kept confidential) and search by state for nursing homes and other facilities. Age Net allows visitors to register for free, but registration is certainly not necessary since the site is open to all.

Careguide.com

<http://www.careguide.com>

Careguide.com is designed to assist people in finding care for the young and old. The site is divided into Elder Care and Child Care. The Elder Care section is further divided into five sections. The Home portion provides general material on elder care, such as articles and checklists. If the user enters an e-mail address, he can receive the Care Giver's Newsletter. The Finding Care section has articles and tips on the types of care available. Also located in the Finding Care section, the Elder Care Search lists facilities geographically. The

researcher has the option of customizing the search by type of services required, but she must then complete the free membership application. The Paying for Care portion has information on the cost of care and ways to protect assets. The Legal Planning area gives rudimentary information on estate planning and the nursing home resident's rights. The final section, Daily Living, posts information on dealing with the day-to-day challenges of elder care.

Nursing Home Info

<http://www.nursinghomeinfo.com>

Nelson & Wallery, a financial and Internet marketing firm created this site. It has brief material on nursing homes as well as a Needs Assessment Survey, which allows the user to articulate what services the nursing home resident will need. The Facility Search is a mapping tool that builds a list of existing nursing care facilities. The list can be produced by city, county, or local address.

American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging (AAHSA)

<http://www.aahsa.org>

AAHSA is an association that represents providers of housing

for seniors. In addition to material on conferences, seminars and the industry, the Consumer section of the page has tips on evaluating nursing homes and information on other types of housing, such as assisted living or continuing care retirement communities.

National Citizens' Coalition for Nursing Home Reform (NCCNHR)

<http://www.nccnhr.org>

While NCCNHR is mostly an advocacy group, the researcher can find some useful tools within the Publications area of the website. There are references to recently published books related to nursing homes (and published by the association), as well as Fact Sheets describing many relevant issues, such as abuse, restraint use, and long-term care insurance.

Endnotes

1. For an additional description of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program see Robin Schard, *Legal Resources on Elder Abuse in the Institutional Setting*, ELDER'S ADVISOR J. Fall 2000, at 81.
2. See 42 U.S.C. § 3058g(a)(3) (1994).

Websites Mentioned in This Article:

- AARP <http://www.aarp.org>
- Age Net <http://www.agenet.com>
- American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging <http://www.aahsa.org>
- American Health Care Association <http://www.ahca.org>
- Careguide.com <http://www.careguide.com>
- Federal Consumer Information Center <http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov>
- Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations <http://www.jcaho.org>
- Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program <http://www.aoa.dhhs.gov/lcombudsman>
- Medicare <http://www.medicare.gov>
- Mr. Long-Term Care <http://www.mr-longtermcare.com>
- National Citizens' Coalition for Nursing Home Reform <http://www.nccnhr.org>
- Nursing Home Compare <http://www.medicare.gov/NHCompare/Home.asp>
- Nursing Home Info <http://www.nursinghomeinfo.com>
- SeniorHousing Net <http://www.seniorhousing.net>
- Seniors-Site.com <http://seniors-site.com>