

NURSING HOME: Who To Contact

Three important people to know in a nursing home are the Bookkeeper, the Director of Social Services (DSS) and the Director of Nursing (DON). The Director of Social Services is one person you will deal with on a continual basis. When checking out various nursing homes, the caregiver/family usually meets with the Director of Social Services and, after the meeting, this person will give a guided tour of the facility. During the tour, observe how the DSS interacts with residents. Does she/he call the resident by name or just "good morning/afternoon;" and do the residents feel at ease around the staff?

During the course of their day, the DSS will usually be on the wing(s) several times and have the opportunity for a one-to-one visit with the residents. At times they are quick to sense when there is a problem with a resident and their roommate, deal with room changes, etc. They may observe when a resident is not well and can pass that information on to the proper person (CNA, LPN, RN or DON). A good DSS assists residents in things from the emotional adjustment to nursing home life to staying in constant contact with the family.

The bookkeeper handles the finances, and you will talk with them monthly if not more often. They send out monthly statements and stay current on Medicare, Medicaid and insurance rules and regulations. The monthly statement usually lists such things as the room charge (payable in advance), cable/beauty shop charge (if applicable), and pharmacy. If asked, the pharmacist will supply an itemized list of all medicines given during the month.

The Director of Nursing (DON) is in charge of the entire nursing staff. This person handles everything from nursing administration to supervisory responsibilities (hiring/firing, delegating work, evaluates personnel, stays current on Medicare/Medicaid and state and federal laws), oversees the day-to-day operations of the nursing home, continually attends meetings, stays knee-deep in paperwork and, above all, must stay cool under all circumstance(s). With all this on her/his plate, the DON somehow still has time to devote herself/himself to their first love – caring for patients.

The chain of command for answering questions or to find out why something is not being done usually starts with the front-line people, the Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs). They are the ones who have the "hands on" day-to-day contact with the resident. If the CNA can not help, the next person would be the LPN supervisor, then the RN, and finally the DON. If following the chain of command still results in not getting an answer, the administrator of the nursing home would be contacted only as a last resort.

It will not take long to find out how good the nursing home is by how the staff act/react if the chain of command is not followed. If a caregiver bypasses the CNA and/or the LPN

and goes directly to either the RN or DON and the staff has no problem with this, it seems obvious the nursing home is well run from the top (Administrator) to the bottom (CNAs). If, on the other hand, staff complain when they are overlooked about any issue, check out the entire staff starting with the Administrator, the Director of Nursing and on to the CNAs. If staff complain among themselves, how do they act/react with the residents?

I quickly came to know and respect the Director of Social Services. Her dedication and professionalism was quite evident. I was constantly amazed at the wealth of knowledge she had on the current Medicare/Medicaid regulations as well as state and federal laws. The residents adored her; it did not matter how busy she was, she always had time to stop and visit with the residents. I recall while we were moving in some of Mother's things, the DSS held the door open for us and my brother Bill said, "Thank you, dorm mother," and the nickname stuck.

I was also constantly amazed at how the Director of Nursing handled difficult situations and/or people; she was all business but there was a bona fide gentleness about her and a deep understanding for whomever she was talking to. It did not matter how busy she was, she, too, took the time to discuss issue(s) and either get the matter resolved or let the person know why certain things could not be done.

I had first hand knowledge of nursing homes but was not aware, at the time, there was a hierarchy that should be followed. A relationship was quickly established with the Director of Nursing, and if I needed to address problems or issues about Mother, I went straight to her. I saw in her my cousin who retired several years ago as Professor of Nursing at a mid-west college. However, I was very careful not to abuse that relationship in that I did not want to bother her with "every little piddling thing."

Although there is a normal chain of command, everyone is different as is the amount of care needed for the resident. Each person must follow his/her own heart when it comes to taking care of your loved one and how you will react to that care. Reading books on health care and talking with other people is fine but every situation is different and must be handled as such.

New Federal Law: On January 1, 2003, all nursing homes that participate in Medicare and Medicaid will be required to begin posting "in a clearly visible place" the number of nursing staff on duty on each shift. Those who must be included in the daily posting are: Registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, and nurse aides directly responsible for resident care. The requirement was enacted as Section 941 of the 2000 Benefits Improvement and Protection Act (BIPA) - National Citizens' Coalition for Nursing Home Reform..¹

¹http://nccnhr.newc.com/govpolicy/51_162_3965.CFM

Personnel

Along with having the name and telephone numbers of the different physicians and clergy, it is also important to have the name and telephone number of the nursing home as well as specific personnel.

Name of Nursing Home/telephone number: _____

Address/City/State/Zip code: _____

Position	Name	Telephone Number
Administrator		
Director of Nursing		
Shift Supervisor(s)	Shift Supervisor(s)	Shift Supervisor(s)
1. 7:00 A.M. 2. 3:00 P.M. 3. 11:00 P.M.	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.
Activities Director		
Bookkeeper		
Dietary Manager(s)		
Environmental Services		
Medical Records/Health Information		
Pharmacist		
Social Services		
Therapy Department	Therapy Department	Therapy Department
1. Physical Therapy 2. Occupational Therapy 3. Speech Therapy	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.