
Chapter 2

NURSING HOME SERVICES

Today, 30,500 Marylanders live in nursing homes, at an average yearly cost of over \$40,000. Nursing home care is one of the biggest expenses you'll ever face. To get the high quality care you need and deserve, it's important to understand what you are buying.

Nursing Services

Nursing care is what nursing homes are all about. Nurses and aides keep you clean and comfortable, monitor your medical condition, give you medications, and look after your daily needs.

A registered nurse (RN) is a licensed nurse with at least 2 years of education at an accredited school of nursing. A licensed practical nurse (LPN) is a licensed nurse with at least one year of specialized training. RNs and LPNs supervise nursing services and provide intermediate and skilled care to residents.

In Maryland, nursing homes must have a registered nurse (RN) on duty during the day 7 days a week and a licensed nurse on duty 24 hours a day.

Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) have completed a training course and passed tests. CNAs provide routine bedside care. CNAs work under the direction of RNs and LPNs. They help the

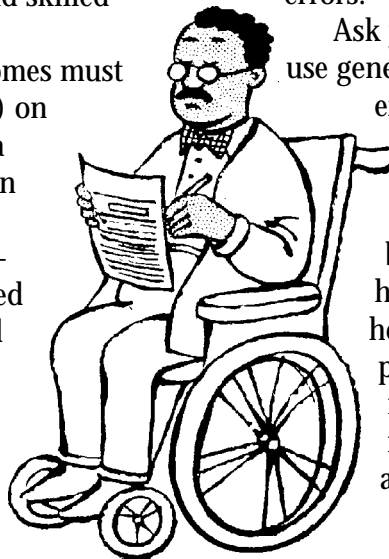
residents bathe, get dressed, eat, and move about.

Medications

Some nursing home patients with chronic ailments take many different drugs each day. Under Maryland law, a pharmacist is required to work closely with the doctor and nursing staff to make sure you receive the right medication at the right time (with food, at bedtime, etc.). A pharmacist is required to review monthly all medications given to each resident. Medications should never be left on your bedside table unless your doctor has ordered that you can self-administer the medication. Otherwise, a nurse should watch you swallow the pills.

To avoid confusion, many facilities use the unit dose method of dispensing drugs. The pills are individually packaged and labeled for you, thus reducing errors.

Ask your doctor if you can use generic drugs, as they are less expensive than brand-name drugs. The cost of medication is not usually included in the basic fee for a nursing home. Many nursing homes contract with one pharmacy to provide the medicine needed by their residents. If you will need a lot of medicine, find out



☞ Consumer Tip:
Ask the nursing home to tell you the ratio of nursing staff to residents.

what the facility's pharmacy will charge you for it. You have the right to select your own pharmacy. If you are a Medical Assistance recipient, Medical Assistance will pay for the prescription drugs the nursing home gives you.

Physician Services

Once in a nursing home, you must be under the care of a doctor, either your own physician or one from the nursing home. The doctor must visit you at least once a month during your first 90 days, to evaluate your condition and review your medications. After that, the doctor can elect to visit every

other month.

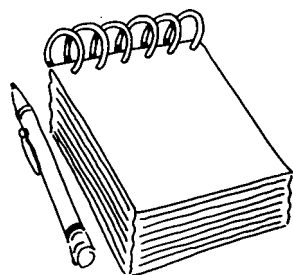
The principal physician in a nursing home is called the medical director. Under Maryland law, a nursing home must have a doctor available by phone or on hand 24 hours a day. The facility is also required to make arrangements for emergency transfers to a hospital.

You can keep your own family doctor when you enter a nursing home if your doctor is willing. Consult with your doctor about this. If you are a Medical Assistance recipient, then Medical Assistance will pay your doctor bills for participating physicians. If you are covered by Medicare, then Medicare will continue to pay its share of your doctor's fee and your doctor's office must handle all the paperwork. You can save money by asking your doctor to accept Medicare assignment. That way, you'll pay only 20% of the Medicare-approved fee.

Therapy

Patients who have difficulty moving around because of illness or injury may benefit from *physical therapy*. The physical therapist or aide uses exercise, massage, and special equipment such as whirlpool baths, heat packs, and parallel bars to help residents improve their strength and agility. They also teach you to use wheelchairs, braces, and artificial limbs. You should ask what equipment and services are available and actually used at a nursing home you are considering.

An *occupational therapist* helps people with illness or injury become as independent as possible in their everyday activities. This is accomplished



DOCTOR'S ORDERS

Only a physician can order physical therapy, speech therapy, and occupational therapy for a nursing home resident. That's why it's so important to communicate your needs to your doctor.

If you receive daily physical therapy, occupational therapy, or speech therapy, Medicare will often pay your nursing home bills. But the nursing home must submit the paper work to Medicare. Insist that it does.

through directed activities, exercises, and instruction in adaptive equipment.

A *speech and language therapist* helps residents speak clearly. This is especially important for people who are hard of hearing, have neuromuscular disorders, or have had a stroke. Therapeutic services may be covered by Medicare, private insurance, or Medical Assistance.

Social Services

Many people find it difficult to leave their family and friends and move to an unfamiliar place. A good nursing home provides extensive social services to both residents and their families. Family counseling, especially in the beginning, is a must. Every facility should offer activities to keep residents active and interested in life. The more social activities, holiday parties and celebrations, the better.

Resident Council/Family Council

Many nursing homes have resident councils for residents and family councils for family. These councils meet separately to discuss quality of care and quality of life issues. Some councils focus on social activities, while others advocate changes in the nursing home's policies.

Religious Services

A good nursing home will help residents attend religious services if they wish. Ministers, priests, and rabbis often visit the home if asked. Many facilities provide religious services on the premises, while others arrange transportation to and from local churches and synagogues.

Laundry

Every nursing home provides laundry service. If you are on Medical Assistance, the institution must do your personal laundry at no extra charge. If you are a private pay resident, ask whether laundry service is included in your basic monthly fee.



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This is chapter 2 of "Nursing Homes: What You Need to Know," a publication of the Maryland Attorney General's Office. Revised 1998, updated May, 2000.