

Caregiving Corner

Resources & Solutions for Caregivers

Choosing Community Resources Wisely

By: Jennifer L. Torpey, MA

If formal caregiving is a necessity for your current situation, then you will undoubtedly be inundated with the myriad of options that you now must choose from. Whether selecting formal caregiving services, a care community, or transportation services, every consumer is confronted with the dilemma of what criteria to have when selecting a company to provide such services. Cost is usually the first criteria that will narrow the selection of companies. Paying for services privately can add up as needs become more complex and, therefore, the long-term costs can eliminate some of the more expensive services.

There are some basic suggestions of how to choose these resources wisely that will ultimately save time and trouble in the end if proper preparation is done in advance. First, to eliminate the companies that would not make suitable service providers, you could contact the Better Business Bureau. Obtaining business history to determine if a company is as reputable as they seem or if they have any previous fraudulent activity that would prevent you from wanting to do business with them is a critical first step. Second, if the business clears the first hurdle, you may want to check with previous clients or ask for customer contacts to find out what people have to say about customer service, quality of service, etc. With all of the advertising tools available to companies, word of mouth referrals, particularly in the senior care industry, is still how most people grow business.

Once you've selected a company you feel comfortable working with, inquire about the costs associated with the product or service. One of the big mistakes that people make when researching this part is that they assume that they will only need one level of service. For example, someone inquiring about the rates at a care facility that has both assisted living and skilled nursing areas may be happy with the rates for the assisted level of care (that suits their current need), but may not think to ask about the rates for the nursing section. If the older adult someday needed skilled care at that facility, they might find they had selected a place to live that they could no longer afford. It is hard to anticipate all of your needs, but doing adequate research to prevent surprises will be of great benefit to you and your family members.

In addition to investigating business practices and costs related with companies, you (the customer) may want to find out about the stability of the company. Many people believe that this information is out of their reach, but there are many questions that you can ask to obtain the answers that you need. Taking this step when preparing to hire any company is important, especially when looking at care facilities. Long-term care communities, as mentioned in last month's article, can be owned privately, by small regional companies, large corporations, hospitals, or they can even be affiliated with a particular religious affiliation. There are many reasons we all want to overlook this face, but care facilities are a *business* first and

foremost – remember that businesses of any type can be bought, sold, merged into another business, closed, etc. To determine some of the business history of the parent-company or ownership, a potential customer could ask how long the current company has owned the business, whether the owner is actively involved in the business, or how many owners the facility or service has had over the past several years. In some cases when the parent-company is a large corporation, financial information is available if the company is traded on the stock market. Additionally, church-supported residences may provide financial history to the congregations across the region that support the care community.

Unfortunately, there is no single litmus test to determine the quality of the services provided by a community or company or to determine what changes might be made to that same service in the future. But, you can follow the suggestions mentioned to make sure you are a savvy consumer by arming yourself with enough preliminary information to make an educated decision about the companies that will provide services or care to you or your loved ones.