

Guide to Choosing the Right Care for the elderly or those with Alzheimer's

Average life expectancy, based on current trends, is likely to break a century (100 years) by 2067. Since the 1800's, the average life span of the human race has increased by 3 months per year. Primarily, this is a result of greater medical understanding, research and improved technology. But more food and better nutrition is also a major contributor.

In Britain today the average age for a man is 75 and 80 for women. In 1870 the average life expectancy was just 41 rising to 53 by 1913, and 69 years by 1950.

Statistics, as we know, is not a precise measure. However, what it does tell us is that the age ranges used to create these statistics has stretched to a peak with many people now reaching their late 90's and even into the 100's.

At Coate Water Care Co. Ltd we had the privilege and honour of holding a very special 103rd birthday celebration for Barbara Sismey, a wonderful lady who had been our guest at Ashbury Lodge since she was just 99.

As this trend continues, so does the need for residential care with a greater emphasis on retaining as much independence as can be enjoyed, respect and, of course, first class care.

Finding the right home is a difficult and daunting task. The standard of care, dignity and respect are very high on the agenda, so too is the environment, facilities and location. Just the same as buying a house, the chosen home is to last for a long time.

In our research we engaged with Coate Water Care Co. Ltd they own and operate two care homes in Swindon, Wiltshire, UK.

Coate Water Care Co. Ltd is a family run business. Chris, Geraldine and their two sons Nick and Jamie have worked hard to build an outstanding reputation since 1995. A major contributing factor to their outstanding reputation has to be the unique philosophy that underpins every aspect of life at Coate Water Care's Ashbury Lodge and Four Seasons homes which is based on a famous quote by Abraham Lincoln:

“And in the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years.”

Geraldine Smith, Company Director said “When the time comes to choose a new home that cares for and respects your needs, Coate Water Care offers a homely environment that ensures that maintaining your privacy and independence is a priority and at the same time truly respects you as an individual. That is what we would want for ourselves and so that is what we provide for those who choose our homes.”

This guide will provide answers to the many questions raised when residential care is the only option.

The main question for everyone is “Where do I start?”

Moving home is stressful for everyone regardless of age. Moving to a new home with care can seem like a daunting prospect at the outset but you can choose to make it a truly positive experience, one which opens up the chance of new experiences, friendships and opportunities.

The whole experience of moving from your own home and settling in to a new home with care is greatly enhanced if you have made informed choices about all aspects of the environment and care provided. By being informed you can be confident that you are making the right choices for you and this is best achieved with thorough planning, research and preparation.

One would hope that you have already had your personal care needs assessed by your local social services since this will have established the level of care required. You will find it useful to contact some of the organisations listed below to research and gather as much useful information as you can:

- What funding / financial assistance is provided?
- What suitable care homes are there in your preferred area?
- What services do they provide?

It is a good idea to take some time reading through each potential home's inspection report, as this will give a good indication of the standards achieved over several key areas by a formal recognised and independent source.

[You will find an extensive checklist and comprehensive contact list / web site links of the organisations and support groups you may want or need to contact.](#)

What do you need to know to make the right choice for you?

Although about 30% of people both find and fund their own care choice, everyone should take advantage of the support and guidance of local authorities and other organisations to ensure that they are making the most informed choices.

There are a variety of ways to find out more information about individual care homes. If you had your care needs assessed by a social worker they will have given you some information but may not necessarily have covered all the suitable care homes in your area.

You, or your family, may want to do some further research to ensure that you have as much information as possible helping you to feel safe in the knowledge that you are empowered to make appropriate choices.

There are around 20,000 care organisations within the UK, with some 500,000 places so when drawing up a shortlist of potential homes, it is very important that you take in to consideration what type of care you require but also how easy it will be to live the life you want within the existing framework of the care home.

What do **you** need to ensure your quality of life? Knowing what type of care you need is often the major consideration but all too often an individual's potential for a rich and meaningful quality of life is not given the consideration that it warrants. Obviously, a resident's physical needs are a fundamental part of the care they receive, but what is sometimes given less of a focus is their emotional well-being. In today's society, when we think of old people, we tend to focus on the word "old", when in actual fact we need to focus more on the word "people". In Western society, retirement is sometimes seen as a withdrawal from usefulness and active participation in society. As a direct result, older people become progressively excluded from economic and social life and can find themselves almost invisible in public life and society in general. Self-esteem may be eroded and a substantial number of older people are left feeling worthless or of little consequence. In many other cultures, especially where oral traditions are strong, older people have played an important role in society by passing on knowledge to younger generations.

Dementia or Alzheimer's?

Additionally, you, or you loved ones, will need good specialist care and support if you have a condition such as dementia or Alzheimer's. Currently there are more than 700,000 people in the UK who have a type of dementia but this figure will rise substantially by 2025 to over 1 million according to the Alzheimer's Society website.

If you have had your care needs assessed and have researched the various care service options, this will help with your decision on whether to remain at home, move to sheltered accommodation or move to a long-term care facility. What is really important is that the right choice is made for you, based on your ability to care for yourself.

If it is proving too difficult for you to manage with the everyday tasks, then selecting a care home can make a huge difference to your quality of life. Residential homes can help ensure that the environment in which you are living is best suited to your needs as they provide specialist care for the residents who need it. This might include help with dressing, washing, going to the toilet and taking medicine. If you are considering a residential home, it is fundamental that you find out whether suitable care can still be offered if you, or the person with dementia, become more confused and dependent. A move to another home can be very upsetting.

If you chose to remain in your home, you can attend specialist dementia day centres which

are usually run by either, Social Services, the Alzheimer's Society or Age Concern. These day centres provide a place to socialise and take part in activities and are staffed by people specifically trained to work with people with dementia. The centre's aim is to create an enjoyable, motivating and stimulating environment for those with dementia as it offers them opportunities for trips out, activities and personal care whilst giving the carers some time to themselves.

Care homes should be placing a greater emphasis on creating a great quality of life for each individual resident as many studies have strongly suggested that this can make a considerable difference to their health and well being. When we view the elderly we would do well to remember that these people have held positions of responsibility and respect, spent a vast part of their lives working and contributing to society and should not just be written off because society these days tends to venerate youth. It is widely thought that the best way to make residents feel appreciated and valued is to recognise that these people have spent the greater part of their lives as masters of their own destiny's and to truly recognise that they still have a voice that needs to be listened to and that the vast majority still have the ability and desire to make a contribution to their environment.

Having a purpose in life is, after all, part of the human condition as it enables us to feel valuable and valued. With this in mind, staff should do all they can to help residents to live as independently as possible. It is fundamental that residents are consulted at all times on what's included in their care plan to ensure that all their emotional, as well as physical, needs are met. They should be encouraged to follow their own preferred routine and to choose how to spend their days as it is vital that one's sense of identity is maintained, if self-esteem and well being are to be preserved. Many homes do already provide activities for the residents, but what is truly important is that these activities take in to account resident's individual interests and capabilities. If we are to genuinely make life more meaningful, and seek to enhance resident's quality of life, we need to put aside all previous assumptions about what the elderly require and actively seek their opinions and understand what matters to them. An annual trip to the seaside once a year may be what "society" thinks older people enjoy and many care homes are realising that they need to stop patronising and start communicating – only then can we truly call these homes for the elderly "care" homes.

Your research and preparation will make the transition process much easier, and indeed something to look forward to. You need to treat choosing your new care home as you would treat choosing any other new potential home – have a list of your requirements in mind and make sure you have a list of questions to ask. Always keep in mind that a care home is not an institution, it is a choice that you make so make it well and enjoy a rich and enjoyable future.

Once you have made a shortlist of homes to view your next port of call should be to check

their inspection reports on the CSCI web site to ensure that the standard and quality of service is high. You need to think about what is most important to you to maintain a rich, happy and fulfilling life and what questions you will need to ask to help you reach your decision. It is often a good idea to request colour brochures from all the homes on your shortlist as this can often give you a bit more clarity on which you like the look of and which you don't. But there is no substitution for visiting each home.

Some homes offer a day centre. This is a great way of testing a new home before committing to living there. The other advantage of a day centre is that the daily influx of regular and new people maintains an active social life with opportunities to meet new people and to make new friends.

To ensure you get the most out of your visit, we have given you some examples below of the sort of areas that you need to think about:

- Consider the location, surroundings and local amenities. Will they fulfil your needs
- Is the accommodation pleasant and does it cater for all your needs
- Provision of meals – is the menu varied with adequate choice
- What leisure and social activities are provided
- Staff qualifications, training and relationships with residents
- Daily routines – are the timetables rigid or flexible.
- What is your first impression of the atmosphere on arrival
- How long has the home been running and what are its origins
- What is the “**statement of purpose**”
- The “**service user contract**”
- Management of the home – who is in charge
- Fees
- Is this home a member of a professional association i.e. The National Care Forum
- Try and find out the local reputation amongst the community

What rights do I have?

As we have mentioned above, you have the right to a care needs assessment and you also have the right to decide on the home you go to – no one can force you to go to a home you do not want to go to. However, this may mean that you have to pay more for your care. Some funding is available but you are not automatically entitled to receive financial help so please see the section below.

You also have the fundamental right to be treated with dignity, care and respect. Should you feel that this is not happening you have the right to complain and each care home is duty bound to ensure that there is a complaints procedure in place that thoroughly investigates each and every instance.

Who pays for care in a care home?

There are different ways of paying for your stay in a care home, with the full cost often being met by a contribution from different sources. The local council's Social Services department is responsible for funding some older people in care but the amount of help you will get from your local council depends on your finances.

As with choosing a home that best matches your needs, it is essential to research what options are available to you with regards to funding as this can be quite a complex task. Seeking independent advice is crucial as according to the statistics on the NHFA website, as few as 5% of people selling their homes seek professional long-term care funding advice which can mean that their money runs out as their capital is depleted. The Nursing Home Fees Agency (NHFA) or The Care Fees Advice service run by Help the Aged offer care fee planning, support and financial advice which will help you find out if you are entitled to state support towards your care. If you are self-funding they will also be able to help you understand the financial products available to meet ongoing care costs and as far as possible preserve capital.

To qualify for local authority support your capital has to be below £21,000, and to qualify for the maximum support your capital must be less than £12,750. Capital includes the value of your former home unless it is occupied by your partner, a relative over 60, a child under 16 years who you maintain or a separated partner who is a lone parent.

If you have £21,000 or more:

If you have more than the upper limit in savings, you will have to pay the full fees for the care home.

However, if you own your own home, its value will be disregarded for the first 12 weeks you are resident in a care home. After this period, the value of your home will usually be counted as 'capital'. This will mean that you will be expected to sell it to pay the fees.

If your house is counted as capital, but you don't wish to sell it, talk to your local council as they can allow you to defer payment of your contribution. In effect, they will be giving you an interest-free loan that will be paid back when your property is eventually sold.

If you have less than £21,000:

If you have less than the upper limit in savings, or when your savings fall to this level, your income and what savings you do have will be taken into account to work out how much you will pay towards the home fees.

When calculating how much you will have to pay towards the care home fees, the local authority must leave you with some "spending" money each week. This is called a '**personal expenses allowance**'. In 2007 this is set at £19.60; this rate goes up every April. Any income you have over this level will go to the local council to cover your care costs, up to the full amount of the fees.

Your income is calculated by adding up what money you have coming in each week and includes any income from savings, any pension you receive (state, occupational or personal), and any income from benefits, such as Pension Credit.

Any savings below the lower limit of **£12,750** are ignored altogether, whilst any savings between the lower and upper limits are converted into a weekly income using a simple formula.

The local council should tell you how it has worked out how much you will pay. Make sure that you ask for this information in writing.

Summary

Homes that provide care for the elderly and those with Alzheimer's are not the institutions that were once dreaded. There is a lot of choice, support and guidance freely available. Often, it was thought that going into a care home (or being "put in a care home") was nothing more than a convenient dumping ground for the unwanted and unloved.

As the life expectancy increases year on year, so to does the need for professional care homes that understand that they are providing a home for, increasingly savvy, pensioners who know what they want and will continue to search until they find it.

Our elders can now make their own choices. Many pensioners have realised that giving up a larger than necessary house, with the associated daily stress of coping with increasing council tax and rising heating bills diminishing their pensions, that moving into a home that provides care, if and when you need it, has many benefits over going it alone.

Those with Alzheimer's deserve to be cared for professionally and given as much independence as they desire on good days and supported well on lesser days.

Moving into a care home is not giving up independence. It is a time to relax, socialise with those that seen the same changes in the world as you have, with a host of memories to be shared and a future to look forward to.

A care home is not a home from home it is your home.

Resources:

Care Home Checklist: (separate file)

Resources - Web site links

Social Services - HYPERLINK "http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Over50s/HomeAndCommunity/SupportedHousingAndCareHomes/index.htm" <http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Over50s/HomeAndCommunity/SupportedHousingAndCareHomes/index.htm>

HYPERLINK "http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Over50s/HomeAndCommunity/SupportedHousingAndCareHomes/index.htm" <http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Over50s/HomeAndCommunity/SupportedHousingAndCareHomes/index.htm>

Help the Aged:-

HYPERLINK "http://www.helptheaged.org.uk/en-gb/AdviceSupport/HousingChoices/CareHomes/as_carehome_050106_9.htm" http://www.helptheaged.org.uk/en-gb/AdviceSupport/HousingChoices/CareHomes/as_carehome_050106_9.htm

HYPERLINK "http://www.helptheaged.org.uk/en-gb/AdviceSupport/HousingChoices/CareHomes/as_carehome_050106_11.htm" http://www.helptheaged.org.uk/en-gb/AdviceSupport/HousingChoices/CareHomes/as_carehome_050106_11.htm

The Commission for Social Care Inspection:-

HYPERLINK "http://www.csci.org.uk/choose_and_find_care/how_to_arrange_care2.aspx" http://www.csci.org.uk/choose_and_find_care/how_to_arrange_care2.aspx

You can view Coate Water Care Co. Ltd CSCI reports directly by clicking the following links:

[Ashbury Lodge](#)
[Four Seasons](#)

The Relatives & Residents Association

HYPERLINK "http://www.relres.org/" <http://www.relres.org/>

Counsel and Care:-

HYPERLINK "http://www.counselandcare.org.uk/assets/library/documents/advice_leaflet_sept_06.pdf" http://www.counselandcare.org.uk/assets/library/documents/advice_leaflet_sept_06.pdf

The Nursing Home Fees Agency:-

HYPERLINK "https://www.hsbcpensions.co.uk/nhfa/pdfs/is6.pdf" <https://www.hsbcpensions.co.uk/nhfa/pdfs/is6.pdf>

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