

SAMPLE PAGES

NURSING HOMES AND THE FAMILY

ADJUSTING TO NURSING HOME

Many people suffer because they have given years of service to their older relative and now they have to put them into care. They feel guilty because they can no longer keep them at home. What they have to come to terms with is that placing the patient in a nursing home is the best thing that they can do for their relative. There they will get the attention and professional care they need.

Professional carers are indeed different from family and friends. Their attitude is different and the time spent is regulated. At one time because they worked with so many people who needed their care, professional workers would not become emotionally involved with their clients. This was considered necessary for self-preservation. The elderly often complained about the love-less attitude of professional carers such as nurses. Today these attitudes have changed, especially in hostels and nursing homes. Here the emphasis is on creating a family atmosphere and personnel have a closer relationship with the elderly.

Going into a nursing home is a very stressful time for the older person. They need both family and staff support. It is important to tell them what is happening so that they won't become confused and agitated. They need to be informed and counselled. The move into a nursing home is overwhelming. The older person has to leave everything that is familiar to them, their home and the treasures they have collected throughout their lives. They have to move to a place they don't know, with people they have never met before. They most likely will have to share a room with one of these strangers.

They find that there are limits on the control of their own lives. Some people flourish, others have major problems.

Many go through loss and grief manifesting itself in the normal way - denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. In denial they say they are all right. They say that they shouldn't be there because they are taking someone else's place. They don't want to believe that they have been put in a nursing home.

Anger may take over. They lash out at other people for not looking after them and causing them to end up there.

They may try bargaining with relatives. The older person promises to behave if only the relatives will take them home.

When unable to go home they may become depressed, believing that nobody loves them.

Hopefully the process ends with acceptance that the nursing home is their home.

For some this does not happen. Some withdraw into themselves and put up a barrier against everyone. Many become frightened when they see people around them with dementia or dying, believing it can happen to them.

Others become rebels. They are angry or short-tempered with everyone around.

They refuse to co-operate and criticize everything. They may refuse to eat, take medication, go to bed, get out of bed, have a wash or shower.

Many older people in nursing homes wait daily for someone to come and take them home. They never adjust and often deteriorate believing that everyone has forgotten them and no one loves them. This can be particularly distressing for the carer. It is best if the older person can be persuaded to make the decision that they need to go into a nursing home.

ENTERING A NURSING HOME

When a person enters a nursing home it is essential that the staff be in possession of certain facts that will help in the transition. Residents need to continue their normal pattern of life as much as possible, especially those with dementia.

The carer should provide the staff with a written summary of anything they can think of that will make the transition less traumatic. The staff will appreciate the fact that the carer has taken the trouble to write it out. They are busy people and it is easy to forget verbal information. Some of the things to include are listed below.

- What does a person usually do during their normal 24 hours? An hour to hour breakdown is a good idea.
- How does that person carry out those activities? E.g. do they have a bath or do they shower? Is it at night or in the morning? Do they have meals in front of television or at a table? What is their favorite TV program?
- Cues can help the staff to make the new experience of a nursing home less painful. Are there any gestures the older person uses to communicate that they want to do something e.g. rub their neck when they want to go to the toilet, rub their lips when they are thirsty.
- What about special things? It might be that they have a favorite cup, the company of a soft toy or a special way of saying goodnight. These things can make life seem more normal for someone who has been uprooted.

It is advisable that a third person possibly a social worker be present when the person is entering nursing home. It is a very emotional time for the patient and the relatives or friends. A third person can provide support for both. It is also a good idea if that person has a follow up conversation with the older person on the second and third days. They can then iron out any problems with staff.