

9 Things NOT to Expect in a Nursing Home

Condensed from a December 17, 2014 blog by **Esther Heerema, MSW**

Esther Heerema is the About.com's Alzheimer's/Dementia expert at www.alzheimers.about.com. She also serves as the assistant administrator for Christian Rest Home Association in Grand Rapids, MI.

"Oh, I can't wait to get into a nursing home! I've waited my whole life for this opportunity and it's finally here!" said no one ever.

We can all agree that expecting people to approach nursing homes with glee is not realistic. But often residents, family members and facilities have different expectations, and that's where things can get challenging.

How can we all get on the same page? Let's start with these nine expectations:

1. Don't expect a one-to-one ratio.

Nursing homes exist to provide care to the residents they serve. But that care (and the funding for it) is not the one-on-one care families might give to a loved one at home. Expect that help will be provided as soon as possible. But if the call light is on, it might take a few minutes for someone to answer it, depending on what the needs of other residents are at that moment.

2. Don't expect the same routine.

Staff should ask questions about the resident's history and preferences, and together arrange a routine that works well for the resident. Things will probably be a little different from how they were at home, but resident choices will be honored as much as possible.

3. Don't expect that all medications will stay the same.

The nursing home industry is one of the most regulated industries in the United States. These regulations include the dosages and types of medications residents receive. For example, while the hospital (or family) may have been able to provide a sleeping pill every night, the nursing home must try alternatives before doing this on a regular basis because these medications can increase the risk of falls.

4. Don't expect perfection.

We all know there's no such thing as perfection in life and unfortunately, it won't be found in a nursing home either. The facility will not do a perfect job of caring for your family member. When they can improve on something, please tell them. (We know there are always things we could do better!) Effectively advocate for the resident by calmly expressing your concern to the supervisor. A good supervisor will be thankful that the resident or family member shared a tip with them on how to improve care.

5. Don't expect a large, private room.

Sometimes a family member ends up unexpectedly in a nursing facility. He may have fallen, broken a hip, gone to the hospital for surgery, and is now in an unfamiliar place. Although a private room is possible, be aware ahead of time that one might not always be available.

6. Don't expect that falls will never happen.

Facilities will evaluate the potential for falls and implement interventions tailored to each resident to reduce the chance of falling, but they aren't always able to prevent all falls.

7. Don't expect family stress to fully disappear.

Watching other residents struggle with conditions such as Alzheimer's or the effects of a stroke may symbolize the potential decline and eventual loss of their own family member. This can trigger guilt and grief. And adjusting to not being the main caregiver can also be a significant loss, even if that caregiver was tired and was experiencing burnout.

8. Don't expect every facility to be a horror story.

Yes, there may be some bad nursing homes. However, the majority are good facilities with employees who care deeply about the residents and go the extra mile. Many people who work in nursing homes have chosen to work there because they feel it's their privilege and calling to do so.

9. Don't expect that the resident will never adjust.

Understandably, it takes time for most people to adjust to a nursing home, as well as for staff to become familiar with the resident's personality and needs. While there is no guarantee that the resident will live happily ever after, many people experience a joyful, active and full life in a nursing home. Positive relationships, choices when at all possible, and meaningful activities can all facilitate adjustment and improve quality of life in nursing homes.