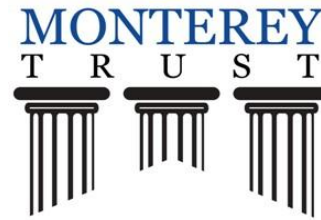




**LIZA HORVATH**  
**SENIOR ADVOCATE**



## **Part 2: Seniors in Homes**

### **Choosing a Facility**

According to the FDA an antipsychotic drug given to elders with dementia can cause death. Last week's column discussed the use, and possible misuse, of antipsychotic drugs in senior care facilities and the questions that must be answered if these drugs are prescribed for an elderly loved one. This second part of Seniors in Homes provides information on how to choose a care facility.

The type of facility you choose is dictated by the level of services required. If you are an active, mostly healthy senior, a senior apartment or condominium facility can be a great choice. These facilities offer independent living apartments within a senior community and many make dining, entertainment and housekeeping services available to residents. Some provide "life care" which means assisted living and skilled nursing services are available on-site. This allows a senior to "age in place" and obviates the need to move should these expanded services be required later in life. Some senior apartments can be pricey but affordable senior housing options are available for those who qualify. Contact the Housing Authority of the County of Monterey, 775-5000, for information.

An assisted living or residential care facility provides 24-hour supervision for residents who may be either ambulatory or on-ambulatory and attendants who can assist with the activities of daily living such as bathing, toileting and eating. Skilled nursing facilities provide the same high-level of care and also staff round the clock licensed, professional skilled nurses for convalescence and medical care for very frail or advanced dementia patients.

Alliance on Aging, 333-1300 or [www.allianceonaging.org](http://www.allianceonaging.org), can provide additional information on the types of senior living homes available in our area.

Once you have decided what level of services you need, visit the facilities. Tour the entire facility and not just the well decorated lobby. The environment should be homelike without distracting noises such as intercoms or buzzers. The temperature should be comfortable and the lighting pleasant. Confirm that you can decorate the resident's room to make it comfortable. Speak with residents. Are they alert, engaged and well groomed?

The quality and quantity of staff is the most important thing of any facility. Ask about ratio of staff to resident. Try to get a feel for the quality of care the residents are provided. Are they treated in a respectful manner by staff? Do staff members seem friendly and



happy? Ask about the hiring process. Do potential staff members undergo background checks and training? How does staff interact with residents, the facility staff should engage your loved one in pleasurable activities throughout the day with walks, music, exercise, visits from pets or group activities.

If the senior is suffering from dementia, ask what training the staff has had so they can best address the needs of a patient who suffers from memory loss. Ask them about their philosophy of care with regard to dementia and how they respond to “difficult” patients? If necessary, what sort of restraints would they employ? Make sure their philosophy is consistent with your beliefs.

Get referrals for facilities from your doctor or the discharge nurses at hospitals. There are also professionals who will go with you to visit facilities and interview staff. The Ombudsman can help and do your research on line to see if there are outstanding complaints or class action suits naming the facility you are considering.

Care facilities offer a great deal of support and are, at times, the best choice. Due diligence and continued oversight can result in a joyful stay. If the stay goes from joyful to nightmarish, however, action must be taken. Next week’s column will cover steps to take when action is needed.

*Liza Horvath has over 25 years experience in the estate planning and trust fields and is a Trust Officer with a local bank. The above should not be considered legal or medical advice. If you have a question please call (831) 915-0272 or email [liza@montereytrust.com](mailto:liza@montereytrust.com).*