

Shady old-age homes? - Check List before moving to Old Age

An elderly parent who was hale and hearty and quite well for her age, was suddenly reported deceased

If taking people for a ride is deplorable, it is more so when those being ripped off are dependents. The elderly and aged, for instance. A look at some of the homes for the aged that have mushroomed around Bangalore shows that one needs to make careful investigations and check details first, before choosing one, either for oneself or for one's parents.

Thanks to factors like rising longevity, the disappearance of the extended family pattern of living, and children moving away as NRIs, there is a rising demand for old age homes. An information directory brought out by the city's Elders Helpline lists over 60 such homes, with charges ranging widely from Rs 700 to Rs 3,500 per month (and deposits of anything from Rs 10,000 to over one lakh and forty thousand). Some are also free, but in spite of the proliferation of homes for the aged we don't yet have any regulatory body or legislation to protect the interests of those living in such places. With the result that there are reports of shady operators who collect money but do not provide proper facilities. At least one such operator is reported to have moved from one place to another, setting up 'homes' and making money out of the enterprise at the expense of the aged.

The most common stories I heard pertained to medical bills. A doctor is often available for consultations once or twice a week, but some inmates have been asked to undergo unnecessary tests (for which extra payment has to be made) and that too, only at particular labs recommended by the doctor. In one case, a woman in her sixties was told that she should have expensive tests done for checking her heart. The receptionist at the clinic (perhaps a new appointee !) naively asked the , when she turned up with her report, if she was having respiratory or other problems, and when she said no, she was feeling fine, the girl at the counter wondered, "Then why have you been asked to go for an echocardiogram ?" The woman had herself wondered - but with age, physical infirmities, both apparent and hidden, become scary bogies, and unscrupulous staff take advantage of this, to scare the elderly into paying for extra tests.

In another case, the deposit which was supposed to be refundable, was returned after heavy deductions, with the explanation that the charges were "for medicines". A doctor associated with an NGO who checked the details of the charges, says it is doubtful if one person could have consumed so many medicines in the course of just four weeks as the home claimed. There were also no proper receipts for purchases, no chemists' bills or even doctor's official prescriptions, only scraps of paper with lists of drugs purportedly given. The aged inmate , when queried by the family, could not remember whether all these medicines had indeed been consumed.

In yet another case, an elderly parent who was hale and hearty and quite well for her age, was suddenly reported deceased, and the family was informed only after the lapse of two days. Why the delay, and why was the body sent for post mortem before the relatives were informed ? No proper explanations were forthcoming. The children of the deceased are even wondering if the organs were intact in the body, and whether there could be a racket of sorts. Nothing could be proved, however, and even the police declared that there was insufficient evidence to book a case.

Common complaints are about insufficient or unsatisfactory food, and lack of facilities promised on paper. **It is common practice to have no written agreements at the time of admission,** listing rules and entitlements. Some homes deduct 10 per cent of the deposit for each year of stay although technically the deposit is 'refundable'. Cases have been known of homes for the aged printing 'donation coupons' of small denominations (Rs 5, 10, which are affordable and do not call for scrutiny) and selling these by the roadside to collect money (which does not always go to benefit the inmates). Sometimes, those running such operations claim political connections, and so action against them is tardy or stalled.

Dr Radha Murthy of The Nightingales Medical Trust offers some suggestions for those who are contemplating admissions into old age homes.

A booklet, published by the Elders Helpline is available free of cost, listing details of several homes and the facilities they offer, the charges etc. Take a look.

Visit the place you have in mind, check out the credentials, and talk to the inmates.

If you are not allowed access, for discussions, be wary because there might be something to hide that the people in charge do not wish to make known.

Not only the families which are thinking of admitting their elderly members but also senior citizens too should educate themselves - about medical ailments connected with old age, coping strategies, for example - and exercise their right to information and right to choice.

A toll free elders' helpline 1090 is available, 8 AM to 8 PM that offers counselling and legal advice. The services offered include police intervention in serious cases, and medical referrals.

And finally, a piece of advice from an inmate of a home for the aged - **"How happy and contented you are, in an old age home, depends partly also on your own attitude,"** she says.

That would be good advice for anyone, not merely for the aged. To that, another elderly inmate adds some advice for the children too - "If admitting your parent in a home for the aged is unavoidable, do not think that your duties end with paying the money. Make the effort to keep in touch, even if you are a NRI, visit as often as possible, and provide inputs that help fight the sense of abandonment that is often inescapable in an institution of this kind.

Pinch of salt:

You might think that buying an expensive multinational brand guarantees quality. Not necessarily, however, as one customer realised after paying Rs 400 for a watch strap at Safina Plaza, and seeing it fray within three weeks. The shop not only refused to accept a complaint from her but was even abusive, declaring that she "did not know how to wear a watch sufficiently loose." For that price she could have bought a decent watch, not just a strap. Check regarding guarantees offered, in writing, if you are paying for something expensive.

By SAKUNTALA NARASIMHAN

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<http://www.deccanherald.com/deccanherald/july272004/spt13.asp>

I hope this article will give you a insight of life in an old age home/ Retirement Township in India. There are so many mushrooming complex coming up. As there is no government body to look into function, facilities and Services provided to Elders at this place, it would be nice if **Before taking the decision to move to an Old age Home pls check following :**

- Check the location of the home
- Check if the facility is suitable for old age people and people with disability.
- Make sure the buildings are Elder friendly
- Check the weather conditions all year round
- Check the drinking water availability
- Check if proper drainage system is available
- Check the agreement, and be sure if its to be given on payment of all the amount
- Talk to residents and their family
- The availability of hospital or clinical facilities nearby in an emergency
- The nursing/medical services offered or promised
- Availability of qualified Social Worker
- Availability of Psychologist
- The type of food given, is proper diet food is made according to ones need
- Recreation facilities for pastimes as promised
- Availability of prayer room

- Security arrangements
- Facilities for accompanying the elderly if they need to go to the bank or post office etc. Or is there bank and Post office around
- Facility for relatives and guest
- Check on communication facility,including Telephone,Internet and their charges
- Check the permission from local Municipal and collector office
- Check if taxes are paid on time
- Check on liabilities
- Check the credential of all the promoters
- Get details in writing, rather than mere oral assurances.

“Cultivate interests to keep yourself occupied, develop serenity, think positive, and grumble less. If there are issues to be addressed, do it without feeling that you are being victimised. Also, if you are healthy and mobile, reach out to the other inmates who may be less fortunate.”

By Sailesh Mishra