Criteria Families Use to Select Nursing Homes

Aimee D. Prawitz, M.S.
Frances C. Lawrence, Ph.D.
Peggy S. Draughn, Ph.D.
Patricia J. Wozniak, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT: The study is conducted to determine families' rankings of characteristics they consider most important when selecting a nursing home. Friedman's two-way analysis of variance is used to test for differences in the rankings. In response to a mailed survey, 231 families rank the characteristics in the following order: quality of care, appearance, atmosphere, location, reputation, building safety, quality of food, cost, and activities. Relationships are also found between the rankings and the demographic characteristics: gender, marital status, education, income, number of homes available, patient/respondent relationship, and distance respondent lived from the chosen home.

KEY WORDS: consumer decision making, elderly housing, long-term care, nursing home placement.

Approved for publication by the Director of the Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station as Manuscript No. 92-25-6176.

Aimee D. Prawitz is a Graduate Research Assistant in the School of Human Ecology, Family, Child, and Consumer Sciences at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803. She received her M.S. from Louisiana State University and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. from Louisiana State University. Her research interests include housing options for the elderly and consumer satisfaction.

Frances C. Lawrence is Professor of the School of Human Ecology, Family, Child, and Consumer Sciences at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803. She received her Ph.D. from Florida State University. Her research interests include consumer decision making and family time use.

Peggy S. Draughn is Professor of the School of Human Ecology, Family, Child, and Consumer Sciences at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803. She received her Ph.D. from Florida State University. Her research interests include work and the family and gerontology issues such as aging in place and housing options for the elderly.

Patricia J. Wozniak is Associate Professor of the Department of Experimental Statistics at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Her research interests include family life and family economics, as well as the application of statistics to the social sciences.
Introduction

The nursing home population in the United States has grown significantly over the last three decades. In 1964, approximately 500,000 people were residing in long-term care facilities (National Center for Health Statistics, 1970). The increase in the number of elderly citizens and the establishment of the Medicaid program were among the reasons why the number of nursing home residents increased threefold by 1985, reaching nearly 1.5 million (National Center for Health Statistics, 1989). As we entered the 1990s, slightly under two million persons resided in nursing homes (Williams & Guerra, 1991).

Current projections are for a continuation of this growth trend in the nursing home population. More than 900,000 of the 2.2 million persons who turned 65 in 1990 (43%) are expected to need nursing home care at least once before they die. Twenty-five percent of that group will stay at least one year, at an average cost in today’s prices of $25,000 to $40,000 (Kemper & Murtaugh, 1991). Since the aging population has a high likelihood of needing the services of a nursing home and the services are expensive, it is important that the elderly and their caretakers be informed consumers of such services. In addition, the selection of a nursing home is a procedure that can be pivotal to the well-being of individuals undergoing placement.

Previous Research

Decisions on nursing home placement are likely to be made during a time of high stress for families who have not anticipated the need to make this decision. Choice of a nursing home is frequently the task of the family rather than the elderly person. At this crucial time, adult children need and would likely welcome help in making such an emotion-laden decision. Therefore, it is important that research-based information be available to those in a position to assist families in the decision-making process related to the search for and selection of a nursing home.

The criteria used by families in their selection of a nursing home is a topic that has generated somewhat conflicting research. Jarboe and McDaniel (1985) found that respondents consistently reported quality of care and employee concern for the patient’s welfare to be extremely important characteristics of nursing homes. Froebe, Balitsis, Beck-