



How to find a suitable treatment setting



Several considerations enter into finding a suitable treatment setting for the patient. The patient's options may be limited by his/her available insurance coverage, by whether or not a particular center or therapist accepts insurance, and the ability of the patient to pay in the absence of insurance. Primary care physicians (i.e., family doctor, gynecologist, pediatrician, internal medicine doctor) may be able to play a valuable advisory role in referring patients for treatment if they have had previous experience with referring to eating disorder facilities, participating as a member of a care team for a patient with an eating disorder, or outpatient therapists. Some primary care physicians, however, don't have much or any experience in this area. Therefore, it's important to ask about their experience before asking for a referral.

In 2005 and again in 2007, ECRI Institute (a nonprofit health services research organization) sought to identify all healthcare facilities that stated that they offered treatment for eating disorders. This included hospitals, psychiatric hospitals, residential centers, and outpatient-care facilities. We surveyed treatment facilities nationwide to obtain information about their treatment philosophies, treatment approach, years of experience, and the clinical and support services they offer. The information is available in a searchable database, www.bulimiaguide.org. This database focuses on facilities offering any or all levels of care (see the tool explaining **Treatment setting and levels of care**). It does not include a listing of individual therapist outpatient practices. For information on outpatient-only therapists, go to the "treatment referral" source at www.nationaleatingdisorders.org; www.something-fishy.org/treatmentfinder; or www.edreferral.com.

Determining Quality of Care

Determining the quality of care offered by a center is difficult at this time. No organization yet exists to specifically accredit treatment centers for the quality and standard of eating disorder-specific care. Leaders within the national eating disorders community organized in mid-2006 to develop care standards and a process for accrediting eating disorder centers. That effort is ongoing. One national organization, the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO), provides generic accreditation for healthcare facilities, and some eating disorder centers advertise "JCAHO accreditation." JCAHO accreditation does not link directly to quality of care for treatment of eating disorders. Another issue regarding quality of care is that much care is delivered on an outpatient basis. For individual psychotherapists in private practice, no special credentialing or specialty certification exists regarding treatment of eating disorders. Thus, any mental healthcare professional can offer to treat an eating disorder whether or not he/ she has experience or training in this specific area. Therefore, it is important to ask a prospective therapist about his/her knowledge about eating disorders and years of experience treating them. Some important questions to ask a therapist are provided in the checklist **Questions to ask when interviewing a therapist**.

Factors Affecting Choice of Treatment Center

For insured patients, the choice of a treatment center may be dictated by the beneficiary's health insurance plan. Health insurers should provide a list of in-network (covered) treatment centers. If the treatment center is outside of the health insurer's system (out-of-network), the insurer might pay a percentage of the treatment costs leaving the patient responsible for the remainder. It is best to negotiate this percentage with the insurer before starting treatment. A small number of treatment centers offer financial assistance; but most do not. However, inquiring about treatment scholarships, as they are termed, may be worth investigating if the patient does not have financial resources or insurance.

Costs aside, other factors may be important to the patient in selecting a treatment center: the treatment center's philosophy (or religious affiliation, if any), multidisciplinary approach to care, distance from home, staff/patient ratio, professional qualifications of staff, their experience in treating eating disorders, and adjunct therapies offered. Some treatment centers provide therapies in addition to psychiatric counseling and pharmacotherapy, like equine therapy, massage, dance, or art therapy. These therapies may be appealing, although you may want to consider whether they're covered by your health insurance.

Some important questions to ask treatment centers are provided at the end of this document. If you are considering traveling some distance to a center, you may want to ask these questions by phone before you invest the time and expense in traveling. Also, if the patient is going to enter some type of facility, knowing how the facility plans for discharge is important. Discharge plans can be complicated and require much coordination of care among different healthcare providers. That takes time. Effective discharge planning needs to start much earlier than a day or two before the patient is expected to be discharged from a facility.

Also important in your considerations are the type of care team a facility typically uses. Below is a list of the types of professionals that are generally recommended to be on the care team to ensure well-rounded care. Once a treatment facility decision has been made, there is another checklist of questions in a separate document in this toolkit—**Questions to ask the care team**—that you may want to ask the care team.

Lastly, there are some questions a family may want to ask the treatment facility and care team separately (i.e., not in the presence of the patient). We have created a separate checklist in another document in the Parent Toolkit: **Questions parents may want to ask treatment providers privately**. Depending on the patient's age, you may need written permission to speak about the patient with a treatment facility or member of the care team. Please see the **Confidentiality Issues** document.





Professionals in a Multi-disciplinary Care Team

- Primary care physician (i.e., family doctor, internal medicine doctor, pediatrician, gynecologist)
- Psychiatrist
- Nutritionist
- Clinical psychologist
- Psychopharmacologist (psychiatrist, clinical psychologist, or pharmacologist with special knowledge about medications used for mental disorders)
- Social worker
- Claims advocate for reimbursement
- Other professionals who administer supplemental services such as massage, yoga, exercise programs, and art therapy

Questions to Ask When Seeking a Treatment Center

1. Does the center accept the patient's insurance? If so, how much will it cover?
2. Does the center offer help in obtaining reimbursement from the insurer?
3. Does the center offer financial assistance?
4. How long has the center been in business?
5. What is its treatment philosophy?
6. Does the center have any religious affiliations and what role do they play in treatment philosophy?
7. Does the center provide multidisciplinary care?
8. Is the location convenient for the patient and his/her support people who will be involved through recovery?
9. If the location is far away for in-person family participation, what alternatives are there?
10. What security does the facility have in place to protect patients?
11. How quickly will you complete a full assessment of my child?
12. Prior to traveling to the treatment center: what are your specific medical criteria for admission and will you talk with my insurance company before we arrive to determine eligibility for benefits?
13. What is expected of the family during the person's stay?
14. Anorexic specific: Please describe your strategy for accomplishing refeeding and weight gain, and please include anticipated time frame.
15. What are the visiting guidelines for family or friends?
16. What levels of care does the center provide? Please define criteria for each level mentioned.
17. What types of professionals participate on the care team and what is each person's role?
18. What are the credentials and experience of the staff?
19. How many hours of treatment are provided to a patient each day and week?
20. Which professional serves as team leader?
21. What types of therapy does the center consider essential? Optional?
22. What is the patient-staff ratio?
23. What is the rate of turnover (staff resigning) for clinical staff? How is that handled with patients?
24. Who will the patient have the most contact with on a daily basis?
25. What is the mealtime support philosophy?
26. Who will update key family or friends? How often?
27. How is care coordinated for the patient inside the center and outside if needed?
28. How does the center communicate with the patient's family doctors and other doctors who may routinely provide care?
29. What are your criteria for determining whether a patient needs to be partially or fully hospitalized?
30. What happens in counseling sessions? Will there be individual and group sessions?
31. Will there be family sessions?
32. How does the care team measure success for the patient?
33. How do you decide when a patient is ready to leave? How is that transition managed with the patient and family?
34. What after-care plans do you have in place and at what point do you begin planning for discharge?
35. What follow-up care after discharge is needed and who should deliver it?
36. Does the patient have a follow-up appointment in hand before being discharged? Is the follow-up appointment within 7 days of the discharge date?
37. When is payment due?

KEY SOURCES:

ECRI Institute Bulimia Resource Guide <http://www.bulimiaguide.org>
 ECRI Institute interviews with families and treatment centers