

A FAMILY'S GUIDE

Memory Care vs. Traditional Assisted Living

A Worcester family's guide to knowing which one your loved one actually needs.



Prepared by Dodge Park Rest Home
and Oasis at Dodge Park

Serving Central Massachusetts families since 1967

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How to Use This Guide

Most families come to this decision quickly and under pressure. A fall. A hospital discharge. A night of wandering. A doctor saying the word “dementia” out loud for the first time.

In that moment, every community you look at will describe itself in similar language: caring staff, beautiful dining room, activities calendar, memory care available. The differences that matter most are not in the brochure. They are in how many licensed nurses are on the floor at

3 a.m., who oversees medication changes, what training the aides actually have, and what happens to your monthly cost when your loved one's needs increase.

This guide gives you a straight comparison so you can ask better questions. Use it when you tour any community in Central Massachusetts, including ours. Bring it with you and write in the margins.

The Question Behind the Question

Families usually start by asking, “Which community is the nicest?”

THE MORE USEFUL QUESTION

“Which community is licensed and staffed for the stage my loved one is heading into?”

Dementia is progressive. The person who needs a reminder to take a pill this spring may need help with dressing, hands-on assistance at mealtimes, and a plan for evening agitation by next spring. A community that is a good fit today and cannot manage that progression is not a solution. It is a move you will have to make twice.

Traditional assisted living is built for older adults who need help with daily tasks and who can direct their own care. It is a good model for the right resident. Specialized memory care with 24/7 licensed nursing is built for the resident whose thinking, memory, safety awareness, and behavior are changing.

The comparison on the next page is meant to help you tell those two things apart.

Side-by-Side Comparison

WHAT TO COMPARE

Nursing coverage

— Licensed nurse often on site during business hours, with on-call coverage overnight. Aides staff the floor after hours.

✓ **Licensed nursing on site 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.** A nurse is present for every shift, including overnight.

Physician oversight

— Residents typically keep outside physicians. Medical direction is coordinated off site.

✓ **An on-site medical director** provides clinical oversight and works directly with the nursing team.

Level of care

— Assistance with daily living tasks such as bathing, dressing, and medication reminders.

✓ **A higher level of care than assisted living**, with clinical capability closer to a nursing home and a cost that is less expensive than a nursing home.

Dementia specialization

— Memory care may be one wing or one program within a larger community.

✓ **Purpose-built dementia care special units, licensed specifically for dementia care under a rest home model.** Memory care is what we do, not a department.

Daily life and engagement

— Activity calendars are common, usually group programming on a fixed weekly schedule.

✓ **A full activity program runs seven days a week**, built around each resident's history, interests and abilities, and adapted as the disease progresses.

Staff training

— Training standards vary. Dementia-specific training may be introductory.

✓ **A large share of our staff are Certified Dementia Practitioners (CDP).** Training covers how to respond to confusion, agitation and the behavioral changes that come with the disease.

Scale and ratios

— Often 80 to 150+ residents with staffing ratios set at the corporate level.

✓ **50 licensed beds at Oasis at Dodge Park and 60 at Dodge Park Rest Home**, with high staff-to-resident ratios.

What happens as needs increase

— Care is commonly reassessed and residents may be asked to move to a higher level of care or to another facility.

✓ **Increasing needs are managed in place.** X-rays, bloodwork, urine tests and EKGs happen on site, not in the ER.

Monthly cost structure

— A base monthly rate with care priced by assessed level, so the monthly total commonly changes as needs change.

✓ **One all-inclusive monthly rate, locked upon admission.** It does not increase as care needs or behavioral challenges grow.

Ownership and decision-making

— Regional or national ownership. Policy decisions are made above the community.

✓ **Family-owned and operated.** When you have a concern, you can speak with an owner.

Track record

— Varies by location, even within the same brand.

✓ **Dodge Park Rest Home has served Worcester families since 1967.** Dodge Park Rest Home and Oasis at Dodge Park have been named Caring.com Super Stars in memory care for multiple years.

Note to reader: The middle column reflects what is commonly found at larger assisted living communities. Every community is different, so confirm each point directly with anyone you tour.

The Four Differences That Matter Most

1 A nurse at 3 a.m. is not the same as a nurse on call

Dementia does not keep business hours. Sundowning, falls, sudden confusion, and medication reactions happen in the evening and overnight. There is a real difference between a licensed nurse who is physically present and a nurse who can be reached by phone. Ask every community you tour a direct question: is a licensed nurse in the building overnight, every night?

At Dodge Park and Oasis, the answer is yes.

2 An on-site medical director changes response time

Our medical direction comes from two physicians: a geriatric internist and a geriatric psychiatrist. Very few communities in Massachusetts have both. Dementia care sits exactly where those two specialties meet, because a change in behavior can be medical, psychiatric or both, and telling them apart is the whole job.

When clinical oversight lives inside the building, changes get caught earlier. A shift in appetite, sleep or behavior gets clinical eyes on it the same day instead of waiting for an outside appointment. For families, that often means fewer emergency room trips and fewer surprises.

3 A predictable rate protects your family's plan

Many families build a financial plan around a quoted monthly number, then watch that number rise as their loved one's needs increase. That is a difficult position to be in, because it arrives at the same time the disease is progressing.

Our approach is different and intentionally simple. The rate is all-inclusive and locked upon admission. It does not increase as care needs or behavioral challenges grow. Families know what the commitment is on day one and it stays that way. For specific rates and what is included, speak with our admissions team directly.

4 Moving once is hard. Moving twice is harder.

The most common regret we hear from families is not about the community they chose. It is about having to choose again eighteen months later, because the first place could not manage where the disease went. Choose for the stage ahead, not only the stage you are in.

Care level is one reason families move twice. Money is the other. At many communities the cost climbs as needs grow, and when private funds run out the family is asked to leave. Here, the rate holds, and residents who exhaust their private funds can stay and transition to MassHealth. Same room, same caregivers, same friends.

Bring This to Every Tour

These questions are worth asking anywhere you visit.

- ☐ 1 Is a licensed nurse in the building 24 hours a day, including overnight and weekends?
- ☐ 2 Is there a medical director on site, and how often is that person here?
- ☐ 3 What is the staff-to-resident ratio on the day shift? On the overnight shift?
- ☐ 4 What specific dementia training does the care staff receive, and how often is it refreshed?
- ☐ 5 Is this a licensed dementia care unit, or a memory care program within a larger community?
- ☐ 6 What happens when my loved one needs more help than they do today?
- ☐ 7 Under what circumstances would we be asked to move out?
- ☐ 8 How is the monthly cost determined, and under what conditions does it change?
- ☐ 9 Who do I call at 8 p.m. with a question, and who calls me when something changes?
- ☐ 10 How long has the leadership team been here?
- ☐ 11 What happens if private funds run out? Would we be asked to leave, and how much notice would we get?

Write down the answers. Compare them side by side when you get home. Communities that are confident about their staffing and clinical model will answer these plainly.

Common Questions

Is memory care the same thing as a nursing home?

No. A nursing home provides skilled nursing for residents with significant medical needs, and it is typically the most expensive option. Dodge Park and Oasis sit in between: a higher level of care than assisted living, at a cost that is less expensive than a nursing home. For many families, that is exactly the gap they are trying to fill.

My parent is still fairly independent. Is it too early for specialized memory care?

Often it is earlier than families expect, and that works in your favor. Moving while your loved one can still take part in the decision, learn the building, and build relationships with staff usually leads to a smoother adjustment than moving during a crisis.

Can you handle behavioral challenges like agitation, resistance to care, or wandering?

Yes. Dodge Park Rest Home and Oasis at Dodge Park are purpose-built dementia care special units with 24/7 licensed nursing, and staff are trained for exactly these situations. Our rate does not increase because behavior becomes more complex.

What if we are looking for short-term help while a caregiver recovers or travels?

Respite care is available when we have a room. Both buildings usually run at or near full capacity, so short-term stays depend on timing. Call as early as you can, and ask to be told when something opens. Families who do get a respite stay often use it to see how their loved one responds before making a longer-term decision.

How do we know the care is good?

Three things worth weighing. First, **longevity**: Dodge Park Rest Home has cared for Worcester families since 1967, and leadership is on site rather than in a regional office. Second, **outside recognition**: Dodge Park Rest Home and Oasis at Dodge Park have been named Caring.com Super Stars in memory care multiple years in a row. Third, and most important, **the families** already here. Ask us to connect you with current families and ask them what they would want to know if they were starting over. Then come see it in person, because nothing on paper replaces walking the halls.

What does it cost?

One all-inclusive monthly rate, locked upon admission, that does not increase as care needs grow. Our admissions team will walk you through the specifics for your family's situation.

About Dodge Park Rest Home and Oasis at Dodge Park

Dodge Park Rest Home has been caring for Worcester families since 1967. In 2017 we opened Oasis at Dodge Park, a purpose-built dementia care special unit designed from the ground up for residents living with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia.

We are family-owned and operated, with 60 licensed beds, 24/7 licensed nursing, an on-site medical director, and staff trained specifically in dementia care. We are not part of a chain, and there is no corporate layer between your family and the people making decisions about your loved one's care.

Services include specialized memory care, dementia care, Alzheimer's care, and respite care.



AN OPEN INVITATION

Come See It for Yourself

You can compare staffing ratios and licensing on paper all week. What you cannot judge from a page is how a place feels at two in the afternoon: whether residents are engaged, whether staff greet people by name, whether the building feels like a home or an institution.

Visit us. Walk the halls, meet our nursing team, and ask us your questions.

Schedule an in-person tour

Or call us and we will find a time that works, including evenings and weekends.

[Schedule a Tour →](#)



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