



## Home Care Services

### An Explanation of Options

Here is an explanation followed by a list of questions designed to help you understand and choose home care services for an elderly or vulnerable adult. By home care we mean services typically provided by a home care aide / caregiver for the purpose of in-home care for an aging, ill, or disabled individual.

#### **What services does home care provide?**

Home care services, as distinct from home health services, are custodial rather than medical. They are most appropriate for someone wanting to live independently but needing assistance with household tasks and personal care. Common home care tasks include:

- Housekeeping, including laundry and linen changes
- Assistance with bathing, toileting, dressing, grooming, walking, exercise, transfers, and medications
- Meal planning and preparation
- Errands, shopping, and transportation
- Companionship and respite for families

Home care services are paid for either privately by the family, through long-term care insurance, (if services are provided by a licensed agency), or by the state for low-income Medicaid eligible families.

#### **Where do I find home care services?**

Families can find caregivers in one of two ways:

- Through a family friend or other connection, classified ads such as Craig's List, or an employment agency (caregiver registry). The family is the employer and assumes all responsibility for hiring background checks, taxes, insurance, and client care.
- A Washington State Department of Health licensed Home Care Agency

Only with a licensed agency is a family assured that critical standards are being followed.

#### **What standards do licensed home care agencies follow?**

- General and professional liability insurance, caregiver bonding, and industrial accident insurance in case the caregiver is injured on the job
- State and Federal criminal background checks
- Professional certification, driver's licensing and insurance, legal work status background checks
- An in-home assessment followed by a care plan that is signed by the agency and family
- A service contract outlining the fees to be charged
- All employer-related services including payroll and payroll taxes
- Ability to keep or change your caregiver without the responsibilities and expense of being an employer
- Professional care supervision

- Training, appropriate certifications, supervision, and the assurance of continuing education
- Substitute caregivers if the regularly scheduled caregiver is not available
- 24-hour on-call availability

### **How can I find the best services? What should I look for in a home care agency?**

Here are important questions to consider

**How long has the agency been in business?** It's relatively easy for a new agency to get a license and open for business, but it takes years of experience to be successful. An agency that has been around for 10+ years is more likely to have the experience necessary to provide exceptional client care.

**How large is the agency?** Most families want very personalized services. But they also want an agency with the resources to provide a high level of customer service, including a staff of caregivers with the breadth and depth of experience to meet changing client needs. A well-run larger agency is the best of both worlds.

**Who does the initial intake and ongoing supervision?** Do I need a nurse? No, you don't. Home care agencies provide non-medical care. A well-run agency will provide an experienced and professional supervisor to meet with the family, perform an assessment, and write a plan of care. Larger agencies will often have both home care and home health licenses from the Department of Health and can provide skilled nursing care including consultation, and nurse delegation for families who need extended services.

**Do I need an agency that is Medicare Certified?** No. Under most circumstances Medicare does not pay for home care services such as housekeeping, meal preparation and personal care. For similar reasons, you do not need an agency that is JCAHO-certified which is more appropriate for hospitals and medical home health agencies.

**Does it make a difference if the agency is independent, or part of a national franchise?** Yes. A franchise home care agency pays huge fees to the national franchise company. Independent companies (such as Family Resource) put that money into caregiver pay and benefits.

**Will a home care agency be able to guarantee the same caregiver for every shift?** No, they won't. Caregivers get ill, have schedule conflicts, or in some instances request assignment changes. However, a reputable agency knows that caregiver consistency is crucial to success in home care. That starts with making a good match and following through on a regular basis to make sure all is going well.

**How do I know an agency will be responsive to my needs - now and in the future? And how do I know if they will provide me with the right caregiver who is dependable, professional, and caring?** When you first call a home care agency and speak to a client care supervisor, how are you treated? Did the supervisor listen to your family's circumstances, ask questions, and respond to your concerns? During the in-person intake, were you and your family member treated respectfully and did the intake supervisor seem knowledgeable not just about caregivers, but eldercare issues in general? The words here are communication and trust. Look for an agency that talks about how communication works - what is the caregiver's responsibility, the supervisor's responsibility, and the family's responsibility. Look for evidence that the agency will do what it says it will do.

A top home care agency will gladly provide you with references. Call the references and ask questions.