



Checklist for Choosing a Home Care Provider

Choosing a home care provider can be very confusing - even for seasoned medical professionals trying to refer their patients to the right company.

This checklist will hopefully help you in deciding on the proper home care provider for you and/or your loved ones.

Assessing Your Needs or the Needs of Your family:

1. Will you or your loved one need rehabilitation therapy?
2. Will you or your loved one need assistance with household chores such as cooking, light cleaning, laundry, grocery shopping, and errands, etc.?
3. Will you or your loved one need more hands-on assistance such as bathing, toileting, colostomy bag maintenance, range of motion exercising, lifting, diapering, feeding and ambulatory help?
4. Do you or your loved one have Alzheimer's or Dementia, memory-loss, or loneliness?
5. Would you or your loved one prefer to live in your own home for as long as possible?
6. Have you or your loved one spoken with Medicare to see what exactly services they cover?
7. Do you have an emergency plan for you or your loved one?

Must Ask Questions for your Home Care Provider:

1. **What are your fees?** Make sure you understand what is included, if they charge overtime, if they do live-in care, if the provider accepts Medicare and/or Long-term Insurance.
2. **Does the provider offer flexible hours and are there any minimum hours per shift?** Some companies do offer just a bath visit or a one hour visit while other companies have a minimum number of hours per shift. If you want the same caregiver to visit each time, it is best to be consistent with your hours.
3. **Does the provider offer a free home assessment, a medical evaluation, and are there regular consultation follow-up and service evaluation meetings?** A home assessment is very important to determine the level of care and the client's needs on a day to day basis. Also, often there are obstacles found in the home making it difficult for the client to be mobile or unsafe area which need to be remedied. It is important that the agency works directly in accordance with the patient's doctor. Regular follow up with the

agency RN to review the care plan every 30 to 60 days should be an option as well. The caregiver also must be trained to measure vital signs.

4. **If the client's health declines, will the caregiver be permitted to give hands-on care?** (A Homemaker Companion Provider *CANNOT* legally provide hands-on care).
5. **Does the provider have appropriate insurance to protect against theft /malpractice and are they bonded?** Even with a level 2 background check, which is now required by all providers, you still need to ensure the chosen agency protects you, the client.
6. **Can you call the provider and speak to someone 24 hours a day, 7 days a week?** This is especially important if you are a part of a "family care team", are out of state or do not live near your loved one receiving the care.
7. **Can you always reach the company for questions or concerns?** If the provider offers home care, you or your loved one should always be able to reach the owner of the company if there is an emergency or a situation which needs to be addressed immediately.

There are three major groupings of home care providers:

1. **Home Health Agencies:**

Home Health Agencies specialize in providing physical, occupational, speech, behavioral, and respiratory therapies in the home or facility during a rehabilitation period. These therapies are usually covered by insurance and/or Medicare. Home Health Agencies often do bath visits covered by Medicare during a rehabilitation period. This type of company will sometimes offer other services such as companion and personal care, but these additional services would most likely not be covered by standard insurance and/or Medicare ; it would be private pay.

2. **Homemaker Companion Agencies:**

Homemaker Companion Agencies address unskilled non-medical care in the home or facility. The caregivers are often not licensed and handle simple tasks such as conversation, meal preparation, laundry, errands, transportation and light housekeeping. If you are in need of heavy house-keeping, you'll need to have a separate cleaning service as most caregivers just will tidy up but will not do heavy house-keeping. A Homemaker Companion Agency is not licensed for any hands-on care such as bathing, lifting, diapering, changing of colostomy bags, feeding, etc. These agencies are usually private pay and ideal if you or your loved one needs just a little bit of assistance with basic life tasks. Be sure to ask how the caregivers are trained, if they are not licensed by the state.

3. Nurse Registry:

Nurse Registries specialize in providing skilled, hands-on care in the home or facility. If you or your loved one needs 24 hour attention, it is usually because the body or mind is not able to function on some level due to injury, or illness. These agencies handle the basic companion care such as transportation, companionship, laundry, cooking, and are licensed to feed, bathe, lift, diaper, and administer medications under the direction of the patient's doctor, in conjunction with the agency staff Registered Nurse. These agencies often accept long-term care insurance and private pay. The caregivers are typically C.N.A's (certified nurse's aides) and have passed a state exam and have extensive training. However, you will still need to verify that they have caregiver experience in the home, in addition to being state licensed. Since these agencies offer hands-on care, if the level of health declines from companion care to hands-on care, you won't have to change agencies or caregivers, creating a more stable environment for the patient and family.