

How To Find Quality Home Health Care Services

By Andrea Kelly

If you feel overwhelmed in caring for an aging spouse or disabled family member, a home health services agency can customize a plan that will provide medical assistance and help preserve the dignity and independence of the person who needs special care.

Home health care services may include hiring a registered nurse, home health aide, physical therapist, occupational therapist, or speech therapist.

Usually if it is necessary to hire a registered nurse, he or she will work with the family to carry out a plan of care formulated by a doctor. Nursing care may include routine physical exams and tests, IV therapy, wound observation and dressing changes, colostomy care, and injections. A nurse will chart a patient's progress or note changes that should be discussed with the doctor.

Home health aide services supplement care provided by nurses or physical therapists. Home health care assistants help with bathing, shampooing, changing linens, helping the disabled dress or go to the bathroom, and may also help with some household chores and meals.

Physical therapists work with patients at home to help them relieve pain, prevent further disability, or restore function through an individually planned exercise regimen. Occupational therapists can help the disabled adapt to daily routines and their surroundings to become more independent in spite of a disability. Speech therapists often work with those who have suffered an injury or lost their speech due to a stroke or surgery. The therapist helps with pronunciation and regaining language skills.

Home health services are available throughout the United States and Canada. Your doctor or local hospital should be able to provide you with a list of agencies licensed to serve your community. You can also look in the telephone directory under home health care and nursing services. Also ask friends and neighbors for recommendations.

When you are evaluating various agencies make sure they are licensed in your state and that they have trained personnel to provide the services you need. Before you contract for services from an agency make sure you fully understand how payment and billing will be handled. Also check with your local Better Business Bureau and your State Attorney General's office to check for any complaints that may have been filed against the agency.

Ask the top three agencies you are considering if they can provide references from previous clients. Talk to the prior clients in detail about their experiences and analyze carefully the positive and negative feedback they provide before making a final decision.

Check with the agency to make sure they are certified to receive Medicare or Medicaid reimbursements and if they are experienced in dealing with insurance companies.

A quality home health agency will provide the family with an analysis of the patient's health care needs by a registered nurse or therapist and work closely with doctors involved in the case to monitor a patient's condition.

Choose an agency that has high standards in its hiring process. A good agency will make sure that all of its personnel have been prescreened with thorough background checks. If an agency hesitates when you ask about training and screening of personnel, be very cautious. A reputable agency should be willing to show you licenses, certification, and provide references from prior and current clients.

Charges for home health services can vary widely among different agencies. Medicare, Medicaid or private insurance may cover all or a portion of home health care costs. Make sure you understand the requirements to qualify for full or partial coverage and that you are prepared to cover the difference if some costs are not included.

Ask how long the agency has been in business and if workers are bonded or insured. The agency you hire should have extensive insurance including professional and general liability coverage as well as bond and worker's compensation policies to cover employees who might be injured while working in your home.

Visit the office of the agency to make an assessment of the degree of professionalism. You will have a better feel for the type of people you are dealing with if you meet with them in person rather than just talking on the phone.

Hiring a home health care provider through an agency relieves you of the burden of handling screening, payroll and taxes, and an agency can send a substitute if the worker calls in sick or can't show up for another reason.