

## Questions to Ask Caregiving Agencies

### **Qualifications**

If you're considering a home care services agency:

- Is the agency licensed by the state? Most states — but not all — require agencies to be licensed and reviewed regularly. Check with your state health department.
- Is the agency certified by Medicare to meet federal requirements for health and safety? If not, ask why.
- What type of employee screening is done? Can the agency provide references?
- If you're considering a home health aide:
  - What are the aide's credentials? If he or she claims to be licensed, check with the licensing body.
  - Can the aide provide references from at least two employers? Check them thoroughly.

### **Quality of care**

If you're considering a home care services agency:

- How does the agency train and monitor caregivers? Does the agency provide continuing education?
- Are the caregivers licensed, insured and accredited?
- Do the agency's employees seem friendly and helpful?

If you're considering a home health aide:

- Does the home health aide have a positive attitude?
- Are you and your loved one comfortable with the home health aide?

### **Understanding services**

Whether you're considering a home care services agency or a home health aide, you might ask these questions about services:

- Can I interview multiple Caregivers? Many local providers only have a handful of available caregivers; regardless of the type of care that you need. There is a tendency to want to match you with their most available caregiver INSTEAD of their most QUALIFIED. If you are dealing with a specific, chronic illness (i.e. dementia) ask your provider to identify their most qualified dementia caregivers, have them provide resumes, credentials and experiences. From there, interview multiple caregivers to determine your best fit among qualified applicants.
- Can your provider offer resumes, references and reviews? (The 3 R's). In 2016, the average agency caregiver had between 1-2 years' experience. Many providers promote how long their company has been in business, instead of how much experience you're in home caregiver has. The turn-over rate for caregivers annually is about 60% forcing most local providers to be constantly hiring and training new personnel. By reviewing work history, caregiver feedback, and references, who have worked with this caregiver previously, you will be able to identify the most reliable competent, and experienced caregivers in your market.
- What is the agency's plan for back up resources? Even the best, most reliable caregiver may have car trouble, encounter inclement weather or have an emergency come up. It is important to understand the capabilities of your homecare provider to understand their plan for back-up care. Do they have access to a large pool of qualified caregivers who can be redeployed to your case in the event of an emergency? This is especially important for clients (i.e. those who suffer from dementia) who cannot be left alone. All families should identify an emergency plan that includes family members, neighbors, friends and additional provider resources.
- Compensation. Ask your care provider how much the caregiver earns per hour in compensation. Many families are shocked to learn that the average caregiver in the US earns \$10.25 per/hour. Caregivers have one of the highest turnover rates of any industry (upwards of 60%!) This is resulting in the most qualified caregivers leaving agencies after 3-5 years' experience in search of higher wages. Even the most qualified caregiver for the job, may not be working through local providers due to such a low hourly rate.
- How does your provider credential caregivers? Most caregivers typically are licensed as Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA) or Home Health Aides by the state in which they work. In addition, local providers should

supply customers with background checks, proof of insurance, references and a work history of the caregiver to the customer.

- Can I get a caregiver who has experience with a specific chronic disease? For example, what if my loved one suffers from: type 2 diabetes, Parkinson's, dementia, stroke, respiratory or heart issues? Because most home care providers employ caregivers with a limited set of experience, it is unlikely that they will be able to match your chronic condition with a specific caregiver. Most caregivers with this type of experience can get higher paying jobs outside of the home care industry.
- Is there different pricing for companion care, personal care or a higher skilled caregiver that might be needed to deal with chronic conditions? Most agencies will try to charge you one price, regardless of the service you need. The price of service should vary with the experience of a caregiver (more experience = more pay!) Unfortunately, even experienced caregivers are still under paid by most home care providers. This means, fewer qualified workers available and higher turnover. Once your loved one becomes comfortable with a caregiver, you will want to know that they will continue to provide services for the duration of care needed.
- Customer service response times – how quickly will your provider be able to respond in an emergency? For medical emergencies, clients should always be dialing 911 and not waiting for a return call from a care provider. However, for other situations; a late caregiver, missing caregiver, or schedule change, ask your provider what their response time will be. Especially if your loved one cannot be left alone! This may impact the health of your loved one, your ability to work, (or to focus on your many other responsibilities).
- Will you receive a written care plan before service begins? The care plan should include details about medical equipment, specific care needs, and responsibilities of the aide or agency. It should also contain input from the doctor, and be updated frequently.
- Will you receive a list of the rights and responsibilities of all parties involved? This is sometimes known as a patient's bill of rights.
- When will service be provided? Is care available round-the-clock, if necessary?
- What procedures are in place for emergencies? Ask how the agency or home health aide will deliver services in the event of a power failure or natural disaster.