

HOME HEALTH CARE: INTERVIEWING AND HIRING THE RIGHT EMPLOYEE

The Problem:



Finding a good home-health-care employee is like winning the lottery. You often go through many employees before coming up with a winner and just when you and your parent or spouse are comfortable with them, they leave. It may

be extremely frustrating and depressing for all concerned. Elderly people, specifically those with Alzheimer's disease, need a routine, and going through several home-care providers only leads to more confusion and anxiety.

The Search:

Most people do not know how to interview a home-health-care employee, whether he/she will be working as a companion, aide, LPN or RN, nor do they know what questions to ask former employers. The first task is to find a reputable agency with experience in placing such professionals. Ask around to see if anyone you know has had a previous experience with an agency in your community. Call your minister, priest or rabbi to see if someone in your congregation does this type of work or has had experience with a particular agency or person. Put an ad in your congregational or community newsletter or bulletin. Contact the Director of Nursing at a hospital or nursing home to see if they know of a staff member who is interested in doing private duty care.



The Interview:

Once you set up an appointment, make sure your parent or spouse is involved in the interview. After all, they will be spending a great deal of time with this caregiver and it is important for them to feel they have some input in the decision.

This may allow them to feel they have some control, especially at a time in their lives, when they are losing control over their physical and mental capabilities.

During the interview, find out from the prospective employee how she views the job. Is it merely seen as babysitting or will the caregiver get involved and provide your loved one with stimulation, such as playing cards and board games, or reading to your parent or spouse.

Does she have experience dealing with a person with Alzheimer's disease? Will she help with the bathing, dressing, feeding, toileting, and changing soiled underwear? If she is not an LPN or RN, does she nevertheless know CPR and the appropriate way to transfer a person from a bed to a wheelchair or from a wheelchair into a tub?



It is best if you find out in the first interview if she will do light housework, cooking, laundry, feed the cat or walk the dog. How will she get to your home? If she has a car, will she do grocery shopping, take your parent or spouse to a movie or the hairdresser, etc? Let her know that if she uses her car for errands or taking your spouse or parent to an activity, which involves a fee, she will be reimbursed. Then make sure to get receipts for any items purchased.

Inquire what she likes best and least about working for the elderly. Ask situational questions: What would you do if...?

In the event your spouse or parent is difficult to deal with, mention it during the interview and discuss whether she can handle him. It is better for her to decline the job during the interview than to leave after a short time and you find yourself having to go through the process all over again.

HOME HEALTH CARE: INTERVIEWING AND HIRING THE RIGHT EMPLOYEE (CONTINUED)

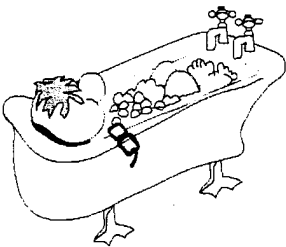
The Agency:

When you use an agency, find out what provisions they make if a scheduled employee is ill or needs to take time off. Is there a trial period or must you pay another fee if a person does not work out and you need someone else? When there is live-in help who works five days, will the weekend person always be the same? Find out if the agency is licensed by the appropriate state agencies.

If you use an agency, make sure they do a criminal background check on candidates. If you are hiring privately, it is wise that you investigate the applicant's background; at the very least, you should run a credit check.

It is important to know if the caregiver has another job while working for you. Ask to see her credentials and resumes and always check references. Ask the former employer(s) to describe her work habits and explain why she left. Not only do you want to know how long she worked previously and what her experience was, but also how she handled emergencies. Did she easily take suggestions?

The Process:



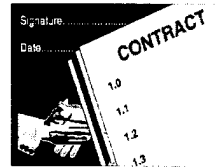
When you decide to hire someone, go through a typical day and describe your loved one's habits. Show her around the house and how to use the appliances. Do not expect

her to plan the meals. Instead write down menus and details, i.e., how your parent likes her tuna or how much sugar your spouse puts in his coffee. It is important to write down who to call in case of emergency and what time your parent needs his medications. Make a chart for the time of each medication and have the care provider cross it off when the medication is taken, so there is no confusion as to when it was dispensed.

If you are not living near your parent, it is important to get the phone numbers of neighbors and friends, as well as to give such neighbors and friends your parent's house keys in case of emergencies.

The Agreement:

Write down the responsibilities, salary, vacation, benefits, and day that the caretaker will be paid. Make it very clear what is expected so there are no misunderstandings. Request that she give you two days' notice if she cannot be there on a specific day. Let her know if you do not want her to have visitors or make long distance phone calls while on duty. If you object to your employee gambling or drinking alcohol, mention this in the first interview. Spell out very clearly if there are certain appliances, sports equipment or any items that you do not wish the caregiver to use around your parent or spouse.



Put all money and jewelry in a safe. Have checks from pensions, investments and Social Security deposited directly into an account and do not give home health care aides access to bankbooks, statements or financial instruments.

Once you have found and hired your dream person, be careful to maintain a professional relationship. Allowing a caregiver to become a member of the family may open the door to possible exploitation, especially if you do not live nearby and cannot closely monitor the situation.

Caring for persons who have lost their capacity to function independently is a difficult and demanding job. When you find a nurturing, patient, responsible and supportive caregiver, he or she is invaluable.

“In spite of the cost of living, it's still popular.”
... Kathleen Norris