



What to Look for When Selecting a Home Health Agency

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Senior Management Services

While home health care may sound ideal for your parents, how do you begin to evaluate the credentials of local home health agencies and providers?

Kay L. Wykle, Ph.D., RN, who is the director for the Center on Aging and Health at Case Western Reserve University in Ohio suggests asking for recommendations from your local Area Agency on Aging, a local chapter of the Alzheimer's Association, your local hospital or a respected nursing home. Family physicians or eldercare information and referral programs are also excellent sources of guidance.

Make sure you shop around for services and contact more than one agency or provider since many charge different prices for identical services. Some basic questions to consider include:

- Is the agency certified by Medicare and Medicaid?
- How long has it served the community and what levels of care are provided?
- Can the agency provide references from anyone receiving similar care to the type you are requesting?
- What are the credentials of the home health aides and nurses?
- What training and certification programs are in place for nurses and aides?
- How are rates structured (hourly, weekly, etc.) and what variable rates apply to weekends, evenings, holidays or long term arrangements?
- Is the agency bonded and/or licensed by the state? What other organizations may accredit the agency?
- How large is the staff?
- What are the minimum number of hours the agency will provide and how soon after requesting assistance can services begin?
- What is involved if it is necessary to request a change in nurses or aides due to incompatibility, etc.?
- What is included in a patient's initial assessment?
- Does the agency provide written descriptions of its services, eligibility requirements and fees?

Once you have selected an agency, try to have a caregiver present when the homemaker service conducts an in-home assessment to evaluate the personal and professional needs of the client. After services are started, follow up by checking on your parent with unscheduled visits or calls to observe the quality of care provided and if possible, personally meet with the nurses or aides. If you are not satisfied with the level or quality of care, you have the right to change agencies at any time, including those certified by Medicare.

For additional information about Eldercare, please contact Quest at 1-800-364-6352.
