

Alzheimer's Caregiving Tips

In-home Care

Seventy percent of people with memory disorders are cared for at home (*National Alzheimer's Association, 2015*). Since the course of these illnesses can last anywhere from three to twenty years, it is critical that the primary caregiver receive regularly-scheduled breaks from their ongoing role. Many families access in-home care for assistance with the day-to-day needs of their family member with memory loss. The information here will help you understand what level of home care is needed, options for accessing in-home workers, and what to look for when choosing an individual or an agency.



Types of In-Home Help

There are two levels of care available, based on the needs of the care recipient:

- **Home Care**, also known as companion care, is the **social model**. This level of care is appropriate for persons who need support and assistance with their activities of daily living (ADL's) as well as supervision and socialization. This level of care is also known as "custodial care" and is provided by non-medical workers.
- **Home Health Care** is the **medical model**. This is a higher level of care appropriate for persons with dementia who are either in the later stages and/or have a secondary medical condition which requires some type of medical care, i.e. nursing.

There are two options available for securing in-home workers and both have pros and cons:

Option 1: You may contract with a home care or home health care agency. In this option, the worker is employed and paid by the agency, and the agency interviews, screens, hires, trains and supervises the employees. Licensed agencies carry liability insurance and their workers are insured and/or bonded to protect you from theft and/or damages. Costs for this option are generally higher than option 2.

Option 2: You may hire a private caregiver. In this option, you are the employer and assume all the responsibility for hiring, overseeing and monitoring the care as well as undertaking the liability and risk. This option is generally less expensive than option 1.

Interviewing and Contracting for In-Home Help

Obtaining in-home care assistance can be challenging. You may want to contact a home care agency that is an employer for their caregivers. If you make the decision to hire a caregiver directly, or to use an

agency that assigns an independent contractor as a caregiver, it is suggested that you consider your responsibility as the employer. Before you employ an in-home caregiver, you will need to interview the person to see if you meet each other's needs. The interview should include questions about the person's work history, personal goals, special training they may have, why they have entered the caregiving field, personal limitations, ability to communicate and other items of importance to you. Don't mince words at the interview stage; things unsaid could come back to haunt you later. Describe the rate of pay, days off, vacations and whether or not you will be withholding taxes. If the worker is considered to be self-employed, he/she is responsible for their own taxes and you will be providing a 1099 form at year end so that they can report their total wages. If the person later claims that they thought YOU were paying their taxes and it is not in writing who is responsible, it could cause YOU problems with the government.

Before you actually hire an in-home caregiver, request a criminal background screening, DMV report; in addition, request and follow up with his/her references. To obtain a criminal background screening and, contact your local law enforcement to request Live Scan Screening. You can request that the prospective employee pay the screening fee as well as the cost of the DMV report. Prepare a contract that states exactly what you expect of the person and what he/she will get in return. Both of you should keep a signed copy. The checklist below is a good basis for this contract.

In-Home Care Needs Checklist

The following checklist can serve as the basis for an agreement with a home health aide. (If you're hiring a private caregiver, the agreement should also include salary and benefits, such as meals, paid holidays and vacations). Clearly spelling out expectations in advance will help prevent misunderstandings.

Check all needs that apply:

Personal Care and Hygiene

Help with personal and grooming hygiene needs:

- Getting in and out of bed, walking
- Eating
- Bathing
- Dressing and grooming
- Toileting
- Bowel/Incontinence assistance
- Collection of lab specimens
- Restorative-care guidelines (position, ambulation, range of motion)

Provide and/or Assist Client With:

- Learning habits, routines and goals of client to provide appropriate assistance with attaining goals
- Design and implement an individualized care plan that includes physical, social and therapeutic activities and outings
- Keeping a medication schedule
- Maintaining a safe, clean, orderly environment

- Assembling, cleaning, and storing specialized equipment
- Keeping medical records as necessary
- Wound care and use and care of medical equipment

Housekeeping

- Light Housekeeping (dusting, vacuuming, picking up)
- Prepare meals
- Wash dishes and keep kitchen clean
- Laundry
- Grocery shopping
- Answer phone and take messages

General

- Maintain a professional manner
- Dress in appropriate uniform and wear name tag (if desired, or if agency requirement)
- Respond appropriately to emergencies and offer support, comfort and safety to family members
- Notify family immediately of an incident or accident
- Report to family any change in condition, including eating habits, skin condition, sleeping habits or behavior
- Perform other duties as directed by the client and family
- Receive/give formal report at beginning and end of shift from other assistant
- Call client or family at least two hours before start of shift if unable to come to work or be on time because of emergency
- Request time off at least two weeks in advance

Qualifications

- Read, speak and write English (or language of the client)
- Maintain a level of physical and mental health that enables appropriate care to be given
- Maintain confidentiality in all information regarding client
- Demonstrate observational abilities and manual dexterity for operating equipment and performing other duties
- Be pleasant, tactful and courteous to the client, family members and guests

Reviewed & revised by AlzOC November 2015