

Hiring Caregivers – The Home Care Agency

Previously we considered the process that might lead to the decision of bringing in someone to provide care at home. This of course doesn't include the unpaid family members, partners or friends who might be involved. While the resistance to having a "stranger" in the house is understandable, preserving important relationships and the health and sanity of our care partners is an important consideration. In addition bringing in professionals might eliminate some of the interpersonal baggage that can come with "intimate" caregivers. A fresh face and an experienced hand can make some challenges melt away.

Once the decision is made to arrange help, the next step is finding the right person or team. If help is needed right away, or you have limited ability to interview and manage an employee, you should contact one of the many home care agencies. The Lathrop Wellness office keeps a list of agencies familiar to us (and we hope soon to establish a criteria allowing us to refer agencies on a preferred status.) From our experience all agencies promise the same service, and the key is finding the right person or team of people who will actually be providing the help. While some situations might suggest looking to hire a private individual, Lathrop strongly suggests using agency staff. With the help of the *Family Caregiver Alliance*, we have compiled a list of the pros and cons of working with a home care agency. In the next section we will look at the issues associated with hiring privately.

Home Care Agency Pros:

- Screening, hiring/firing, pay, taxes are handled through the agency
- Training and staff oversight
- Can offer attendants with a variety of skills and match you with a staff member who can provide the care that you need
- Able to accommodate variable schedules that might be inconsistent or unpredictable at times
- If worker is sick/goes on vacation, agency will provide a substitute
- If worker is not the right fit, can send an alternate choice
- Can help settle disputes with you/attendant
- Often covered by long-term care insurance and many have staff to help facilitate this

Home Care Agency Cons:

- May schedule more than one attendant if work hours are not consistent, requiring separate orientation for and adjustment to each new person
- May experience more staff turnover
- May limit or charge more for certain tasks
- Most agencies require a minimum number of hours per visit, anywhere from 2-4.
- Typically more expensive than private hire (though the care provider is paid less, as the oversight and backup staffing cost is included) ***The current average rate is \$24/hr for average 3 hr shifts.***

If time allows it's good to speak to several agencies. Try to get a sense of their flexibility and likely attention to your needs. Discuss how staff are supervised and what their general level of training and licensure are. *Note that in Massachusetts, this type of Home Care business does not require certification or licensure, but the aides themselves may be Certified Nurses Assistants or licensed Home Health Aides.*

Agencies should be bonded and carry their own liability insurance. (More on liability in the next section)

After contacting a home care agency, they will send a staff member to complete an intake interview, during which they will explore with you the type of care needed. Be sure to ask about:

- The agency's ability to insure the presence of staff in case of call out etc
- The process of supervising the performance of the aide
- The availability of a nurse who could help with medication management
- Whether they provide transportation or can drive the care receiver in their own car
- What amount of notice is needed to terminate the service

The larger the agency, the greater capacity they have to meet a variety of needs and to start service on short notice. From our experience they may also have a wider range of skilled staff members so consistency and supervision can suffer. And while the scheduler and the office support are important, it is the caregiver or team of aides who will in the home and working to meet your needs, so it is important to be patient and persistent in asking the agency to help you find the right match.