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Issues

Information and ideas for those
serving seniors.

on Aging

Choosing qualified, ethical caregivers for clients.

Typically, as people grow older, they need help with such things as shopping, yard work, meal preparation, laundry, and cleaning. As their health deteriorates, they may also need an increased level and amount of care with hygiene, bathing, dressing, grooming, and toileting. Finding qualified and ethical caregivers to meet these needs can be challenging.

The Nurse Practice Act of Minnesota specifies the types of personal care that can be provided by different levels of caregivers. A health assessment to determine the level and amount of care needed must be conducted by a registered nurse, who then delegates certain tasks to people with less education, training and licensure. Home health aides are required to work under the direct supervision of a registered nurse.

Homemakers, companions and home health aides can be hired privately or from an agency. Homemakers and companions are not required to be licensed, but when hired by an agency must adhere to its personnel policies. Home health aides provided by an agency must meet certain criteria and function under the direction of the agency's nursing supervisor. There is currently a law requiring privately-hired caregivers to be licensed in Minnesota.

There are pros and cons to hiring caregivers privately versus through an agency.

HIRING CAREGIVERS PRIVATELY.

Pros

- Can select caregiver(s) with desirable qualities.
- Often less turnover.

Cons

- Background checks not usually performed.
- Determination of needs and supervision by professional nurse not usually performed.
- Increased incidence of theft and/or financial manipulation.
- Tax withholding must be done by client/surrogate.
- Worker's compensation insurance must be purchased by client/surrogate.
- Back-up plan for sick days often not in place.

HIRING CAREGIVERS THROUGH AN AGENCY.

Pros

- Agency conducts background checks and is bonded.
- Agency provides skilled nursing supervision.
- Less incidence of theft or financial manipulation.
- Agency provides worker's compensation insurance.
- Agency does tax withholding.

Cons

- Agency may be reluctant to allow client/surrogate to interview caregivers.

- Turnover may be greater.
- Cost may be higher although supervision, taxes, benefits and worker's compensation insurance are included.
- Agencies may suggest more hours or a higher level of caregiver than is actually required.

Matrix AdvoCare Network is frequently asked to help clients obtain home care services. This process begins with a Comprehensive Assessment to determine each client's specific needs. Recommendations for the amount and level of care are then made.

When hiring care through an agency, Matrix recommends several competent agencies in the client's area, assists the client in choosing compatible caregivers from the agency, and ensures that the amount and level of care is appropriate. The care manager stays involved to manage problems such as inappropriate emotional or financial involvement on the part of the caregivers, and to adjust the level and amount of care as needed.

When the client or surrogate wishes to hire private caregivers, Matrix has policies in place to ensure that privately hired caregivers are qualified, free from criminal convictions, and properly supervised. This prevents such problems as emotional or financial manipulation, theft, over charging, avoiding payment of taxes, and claiming work-related injuries without worker's compensation insurance in place.

with cognitive impairments needs a caregiver who knows how to manage and direct someone with dementia.

Some caregivers have proof of graduation from a training program for nursing assistants, qualifying them as a Certified Nurse Aide or Certified Nursing Assistant. They can be placed on the Medicare registry and work in Medicare-certified nursing homes. Due to their limited training, federal guidelines indicate that this type of caregiver should work under the direct supervision of a registered nurse.

Caregivers who have passed the home health aide course and competency test are certified as Home Health Aides and have a higher level of skill than Certified Nursing Assistants. Home Health Aides are required to have ongoing continuing education. These individuals are considered adequately trained to work under the indirect supervision of a registered nurse who makes regular supervisory visits.

Home caregivers hired through an agency should be licensed Home Health Aides. The education of privately-hired caregivers varies greatly, from little or no training to Certified Nursing Assistants or Home Health Aides. The registered nurse making the assessment of the client's needs can best determine the qualifications and abilities of the caregivers.

Q. What can I do when I am concerned about the ethics or abilities of a caregiver?

A. The most effective way to evaluate a caregiver's capabilities is to obtain a professional assessment of the client's needs and the caregiver's abilities. Matrix care managers provide a Comprehensive Assessment of the client's specific needs and vulnerabilities. This includes a private interview with the client during which the relationship with the caregiver is discussed.

Next, the caregiver's skills, behaviors, motivations, and attitudes are assessed, including determination of active certification as a Nursing Assistant or Home Health Aide. A background check of the caregiver can be obtained. If a caregiver is unqualified to meet the needs of the client but the client/responsible party wishes to retain him or her, the necessary skills can be gained through coursework. If the caregiver should not be retained, documentation is made of the reasons and the caregiver is replaced.

When emotional or financial manipulation is suspected, close monitoring by the care manager is indicated. The care manager can directly assess the issue with the caregiver in a care conference with the responsible party and develop a plan of care to avoid allowing exploitation of the client.

Q & A

Q. How can I know whether a caregiver is qualified?

A. A caregiver who is qualified to care for one client may not be qualified to care for another. Because client needs vary widely, it is important to determine specific care needs. This is best done by a registered nurse. Then a caregiver with appropriate skills and training can be sought.

For example, clients who need help only with housekeeping do not need a caregiver skilled as a home health aide, while a client who needs help with transferring and personal care does. A client