



*The Elder Expert*

# Good Help Is Hard to Find

By Amy Fuchs

That is especially true when hiring a caregiver for your loved one. Because of the personal nature of this job, the need to find trustworthy help is paramount. More and more people wish to remain in their homes as long as possible. One way to do that safely is to hire home care.

## WHAT IS HOME CARE?

Home care can be defined as either long- or short-term supportive care from a skilled individual that allows people with medical needs to remain in their homes. Home care may be appropriate for people who are aging, chronically ill or recovering from an illness; or are disabled or have cognitive impairments. Home care services include, but are not limited to, personal care, such as bathing, grooming, dressing, meal preparation, light house-keeping, laundry and medication reminders, to name a few.

This type of care is typically less expensive than institutional care, more convenient and just as effective as care received in an assisted living or skilled nursing home setting.

Below you will find a few suggestions on how to hire a caregiver for your loved one. Depending on the caregiver's level of certification, he or she may perform functions in a wide array of home care services, including companion care (non-medical) and home health aide (medical) services. However, first, let's differentiate between home health aides and companions.

## WHAT IS A HOME HEALTH AIDE?

A home health aide (HHA) is a trained and certified health care worker who provides assistance to a patient in the home with personal care and light household duties and monitors the patient's condition. Duties may include bathing, hair washing and shaving, dressing assistance, exercise, meal preparation or medication reminders; also he or she may help with

toileting, ambulation, transferring and other personal care needs.

HHAs often act as a surrogate caregiver and friend when family members or loved ones cannot be present. It can give family and friends the peace of mind that their loved ones are getting the attention they deserve, the companionship they desire and the care they need to remain safe at home. All HHAs receive very specialized training and can perform hands-on care, including all functions of a companion. They are certified by the state as health care providers.

## WHAT IS A COMPANION?

Companions provide non-medical assistance, such as emotional support, supervision, light housekeeping and social interactions, to help elderly adults function independently in their own home environments. Companions visit clients in their homes as often as necessary; for short visits or 24 hours a day. The companion will not provide hands-on care for the client (such as feeding and dressing) but will provide companionship, respite for the main caregiver and encouragement. A companion's duties may include dish washing, laundry and ironing, light cleaning, mopping and vacuuming, changing bed linens, watering plants, preparing meals and grocery shopping. Other activities may entail taking walks, playing games and reading, performing miscellaneous errands, caring for pets and taking the client to appointments.

## HOW DO YOU FIND A CAREGIVER?

There are several different ways to find a caregivers. The most common is through a Certified Home Health Agency. Many home care agencies employ both HHAs and companions. Caregivers may be hired for short-term or long-term situations and are bonded and insured; background checks are completed on each one. This is a great option for those looking for consistency and immediate care.

Another way to find a caregiver is by word-of-mouth or informal referrals. This is a riskier option. However, if you have a personal reference and are able to interview the caregiver beforehand, then you may want to choose this option for your loved one. This is also a less expensive option since there are no overhead fees. It would be prudent to provide your own background check on the caregiver.

Lastly, there are referral services. Like home care agencies, they rigorously vet the caregivers, but you, as the client, employ the caregiver directly and pay a fee to the referral service. All are viable options; you just have to choose the one that works best for you.



*Amy Fuchs, LCSW, C-ASWCM, is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Certified Geriatric Care Manager. She has been assisting and guiding families for over 15 years. She founded The Elder Expert, LLC in 2008, a geriatric care management firm based in Bergen County, NJ. If you have a question or a topic that you would like Amy to address, email it to editorautumnyears@gmail.com*