



Choosing a Non-Medical Home Care Agency

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Questions to answer before starting your research:

- 1) What do you or your family member need help with?
- 2) How many hours per day do you think you will need?
- 3) What skills are necessary in a care provider?
- 4) What types of personality traits will meet the match of the person in need of assistance.

How do you begin your search?

- 1) Ask friends or the Lamorinda Village office for suggestions on places to call.
- 2) Know that there are at least two different types of companion caregiving agencies.
 - a) **“Agencies”** provide all the insurances, taxes, benefits required by labor laws and assume the liability – these are often referred to as “agencies”. Since the agency supervises, trains, does background screening, and provides all the benefits and sometimes more benefits than is required by the law, the hourly fees can be a few dollars more compared to a registry.
 - b) **“Registry”** provides you a caregiver but the liability is yours even though you are paying that agency for the caregiver – that is called a “registry”. Caregivers are screened and background-searched but paid as independent contractors, so they are not provided insurance, benefits, or Social Security. Worker’s



Compensation is not covered by registries –families have to add this to homeowner’s insurance. This might cost a few dollars less an hour because more of the liability is assumed by the employer (you, the family) and the employee.

- c) **“Licensed Home Health”** provides skilled professionals that can do the tasks that companion care agencies cannot, such as medication set-up and management, injections, gastric feeding, IVs, and other tasks that require a licensed nurse or therapist. Often these tasks are covered by Medicare, but for chronic conditions they are private pay.

Questions to Ask & Observations to Make:

- 1) Is the call being answered by a person or a message machine and can they answer your questions or give you someone who can answer your questions at the time you call? Do they have 24/7 on-call with a live professional for emergencies?
- 2) How long has the provider been serving the community? Do they have references you can speak with?
- 3) Who is the Executive Director and what is this person’s background? Ideally, it should be someone with a Health and Human Services degree. Who owns the company?
- 4) In the State of California, companion care is not yet licensed (2015). However, you can ask if the agency is a member of the National Association of Home Care Providers or whether they have Joint Commission Accreditation. This lets you know they have met criteria for ethical, knowledgeable services.
- 5) Is the agency bonded and do they have appropriate liability insurance? You can ask to see a copy of the policy certification.
- 6) How do they screen, select, and train care providers? Does the agency provide written personal policies to employees and a handbook for families?



- 7) Does someone skilled (nurse, social worker, certified care manager) evaluate the client's home before home care begins? Would they write up a plan of care based on this evaluation?
- 8) Does the provider assign a supervisor to oversee the quality of services? How often is the client visited? Who would the client call if they had questions or complaints?
- 9) Does the agency provide Professional Certified Care Managers that are optional additional services for advocacy, care planning, service arranging outside of home care as well as family communication and education?
- 10) Can the client or the family request a different caregiver if the personality match is wrong? How many different care providers will work with the client in any given week?
- 11) Fees: Is there a written agreement stating the fees, explaining all the costs and the payment options associated with home care? Will they assist with completing paperwork for Long Term Care Insurance?
 - a) How often and when are fees increased?
 - b) When is overtime charged? Which holidays have extra fees associated with them?
- 12) How is confidentiality protected?
- 13) What are the procedures if staff does not show up?
- 14) Does the agency have an emergency plan to cover natural disasters?
- 15) Ask about specific training of caregivers in areas such as Alzheimer's/Dementia, Cardiac, End of Life, Hospice, Diabetic Care that you would want for yourself or your family member.