

Who will care for me?

## HOME HEALTH CARE

By Judith S. Parnes, L.C.S.W., C.M.C

Home health care is now an important and very real part of life in the United States. As the population continues to age, a large percentage of people will need home health care in the years to come. As a concerned relative or friend, you may need to find care for someone at home.

Home care makes it possible for older persons to remain at home and maintain ties with their community, friends and family. In many cases, it may also be less expensive than the alternative of nursing home or assisted living care, depending on the amount of time a home health aide is actually required.

There are three means of paying for home health care: (1) insurance, including Medicare, Medicaid and private insurers; (2) public funding; and (3) private payment. The first step in securing home health care is to ascertain if insurance will cover the cost. Next, determine if the elderly person may qualify for any publicly funded programs. Ultimately, home care may need to be paid from private funds.

Finding the home care provider best suited for your needs requires research, but it is time well spent. Important factors include the quality of care, availability of needed services, personnel training and expertise, and coverage provided by the payor. Before starting a search, it is important to determine which types of services are needed. A Geriatric Care Manager would be able to assist in identifying your needs and the best provider of these services. Caution is needed in hiring the caregiver with the obvious concern related to vulnerability and potential exploitation.

After you have found a home health care provider, it is imperative that you continue to monitor the quality of the care your loved one receives. Having a detailed, written care plan or utilizing the services of a professional Geriatric Care Manager can help.

*Next column: Who Will Care For Me Part II*

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## **HOME HEALTH CARE- PART II**

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According to recent research, most elderly in this country are cared for by their families. Family members provide either direct care, or are responsible for pursuing other alternatives. When the caregiver can no longer do it all, there is often little time to find a home health care provider. Cost alone is not the only variable needing consideration.

When a caregiver is needed, it is important to identify the needs and habits of your loved one and your family. The first need to identify is the hours and days you would like the caregiver to be available to work. A brief list of other things to consider would include assistance with such things as bathing, dressing, toileting, walking, cooking, cleaning, and shopping. Other concerns would include the need for plant or pet care and socialization with things like being read to, playing board games or simply holding conversations.

Quality of care can differ among home health agencies. To help sort through your options, ask questions to help evaluate the services. There are several facets to home care, so asking the right questions up front can help you choose the best agency for your loved ones needs. Listed below are some suggestions to ask agencies when arranging home health care services:

**RATE** (per hour) Weekday \_\_\_\_\_ Weekend \_\_\_\_\_ Live-In \_\_\_\_\_

**SUPERVISION?** qualifications of supervisor, visits to clients by supervisor, if yes, how often, ratio of supervisors to health aide staff, replacement available when aide calls out, pager system in place

**TRAINING OF AIDES?** number of training hours, number of aides certified, Number of aides uncertified

**AGENCY INFORMATION?** bonded, current license and type, accreditation and by whom, written personnel policies, references.

After you have found a home health care provider, it is imperative that you continue to monitor the quality of the care you or your loved one receives. Having a detailed, written care plan or utilizing the services of a professional geriatric care manager can help. If you have any questions about the care you are receiving, be sure to have someone follow up.

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