

SELECTING THE RIGHT HOME CARE AGENCY

Visiting Nurse Association of Western Michigan

As you look for a home care agency, your doctor, friends and family members may be able to offer you suggestions on agencies that they have worked with, or used, in the past. Once you acquire the names of several agencies, you will want to learn more about their services and reputations. The following are some questions that the Michigan Home Health Association suggests you ask home care providers to help you determine which agency is best for you or your loved one.

1. How long has the agency been serving the local community?
2. Is the agency certified by Medicare? A Medicare-certified home care agency is one that can provide Medicare and some Medicaid home health services. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Service (CMS) has more quality measures and other information at www.medicare.gov on the web or call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227).
3. Is the agency accredited? Accreditation is currently voluntary and it signifies that the agency has met national industry standards. Agencies may be accredited by the Community Health Accreditation Program (CHAP) and/or the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO).
4. Does the agency provide literature explaining its services, eligibility requirements, fees and funding sources? Many providers also supply patients with a "Patients Bill of Rights" that outlines the rights and responsibilities of the providers, patients, and caregivers alike.
5. How does the agency select and train its employees? Does it check references and criminal records on new employees? Does it have personnel policies and malpractice insurance? How do they maintain patient confidentiality?
6. Are the agency's nurses or therapists required to evaluate the patient's home care needs? If so, what does this entail? Are the patient's physicians and family members consulted?
7. Is the patient's course of treatment documented, detailing the specific tasks to be carried out by each professional caregiver? Is a copy of this plan given to the patient and his/her family member and updated as changes occur?
8. Does the agency assign supervisors to oversee the quality of care patients are receiving in their homes? Whom can you call with questions or concerns? How are problems followed up and resolved?
9. Does the agency take time to educate family members on the type of care that is being provided? How do they do this?

10. What procedures are in place to handle emergencies? Are the agency's caregivers available 24 hours a day, seven day a week?

About the Author:

Christina Conklin is the Chief Administrator of the Visiting Nurse Association of Western Michigan and currently is President of the Michigan Home Health Association. With over 30 years of professional experience in home health care, she provides a wealth of experience in how to choose a home health care provider. The VNA can be reached at 774-2702 if you have a question about home health care for you or someone close to you.

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For more information consult our website at www.caregiverresource.net or call toll free at 888-456-5664.