

Selecting the Right Home Health Agency

Our nation is getting older. There's no question about it. As we age many people are caught in what has been referred to as the "sandwich generation". That means they are, at the same time, responsible for caring for aging parents in addition to their own young children. Literally they are "sandwiched" between these two generations and responsibilities. Those who find themselves in this situation will likely be making some significant health care decisions for their parents.

If you're in this potentially tense and uncomfortable spot, first, you'll want to be certain to consider a qualified home health agency for your loved one rather than a nursing home or care center. It's well known that, with regular professional care, patients will typically do better in their own homes whenever it's possible to treat them in that environment.

Qualified home health agencies will typically offer a wide variety of care services, from simple daily assistance with tasks such as bathing, fixing meals and light housework, to full-time skilled nursing and even hospice care. Other home health agencies are quite limited in their services. It's a good idea to select a home health agency that can provide the additional services your loved one may need in the future.

This is an important consideration as your loved one advances in years and becomes less able to cope with normal daily activities. It is comforting to know that the home health agency you have selected can continue to provide care and your family member won't have the added stress of moving or becoming accustomed to new care givers.

Home health agencies such as Family Home Care & Hospice (FHC), based in Spokane, Washington, serve as a prime example of an organization with the resources to "grow" with the patient.

"It has been our purpose from the beginning to offer a range of services which would allow us to continue with patients as long as possible," explained Michael Nowling, FHC's President. "Every evidence indicates that outcomes are more positive for the patient and the family if care can be effectively provided in the home."

Indeed, FHC has been recognized by Medicare as among the top 1 percent of home health agencies in Washington State and among the top 3 percent of home health agencies in the nation. This recognition is based on extensive monitoring of patient outcomes and lends credibility to their stated goal of keeping patients in their own homes as long as possible. Medicare maintains a database of information about home health agencies and their patient outcomes. It's a good idea to visit their website and look at the data when considering a home health agency. You can log on at <http://www.medicare.gov/HHCompare/home.asp>.

Most patients will do very nicely utilizing the standard list of services offered by a qualified home health agency, but sometimes specialized services may be required. It is a good idea when evaluating your home health agency selection, to ask what specialized services are available. The chances of your loved one needing these services may be small, but if such a need ever arises you'll find comfort in knowing that your chosen agency can deliver those services. Specialized treatments or services may include primary care medical services, enteral therapy or wound care specialists.

Staffing a home health agency is a never ending difficulty. As a result, the best agencies have developed well defined criteria for employment and perform extensive screening of employees. Keeping good employees also requires a specialized effort in education and training. It is perfectly appropriate for you to ask your prospective home health agency how they handle recruiting and staffing issues.

"We've often heard that it is tough to land a job at FHC," Nowling noted, "but we believe it should be. FHC has grown to become the organization it is primarily as a result of how picky we are in our hiring practices. Because we're so selective we have a unique group of employees who are interested in maintaining the highest standards of professionalism. They are dedicated to their patients and they work hard. They tend to stay at FHC for a long time. This makes a big difference to our patients and their families especially as it relates to positive outcomes. This is how we are able to be ranked so highly by Medicare."

Just as important as a home health agency's ability to find and maintain a qualified staff is their commitment to keeping that staff trained and educated in the state of the art techniques and therapies. Ask about their training and continuing education programs.

"Advances in technology have brought highly specialized medical equipment into the home," Nowling continued. "It is the responsibility of a good home health agency to see that employees are continually kept abreast of the latest developments in care."

It goes without saying that insurance coverage is a critical consideration in your home health agency selection process. Most agencies accept

Medicaid, Medicare and private insurance, but it is always best to ask specific questions not only of your potential home health agency, but also of your insurance company. Combing through the legalese of your insurance policy may not always get your question answered. It is often better to simply ask a customer service representative at your insurance carrier.

If you haven't been taking notes as you read, here is a handy checklist:

Find a qualified home health agency or two for your list

Determine what their standard services will be

Determine the extent of their specialized services

Visit the Medicare website to check out and compare your selections: <http://www.medicare.gov/HHCompare/home.asp>

Ask about their hiring and screening policies

Ask about their staff training programs

Find out what insurance coverages are applicable

If you're one of the "sandwich" generation, then you owe it to your parents or loved ones to thoroughly investigate all your health care options. Make sure that home health agencies are on your list. Chances are your parent or loved one will be grateful you did.

About the Author

Serving the Inland Northwest for more than 4 decades, [Family Home Care & Hospice](#) is synonymous with [Spokane home care](#). FHC's history of positive outcomes gained recognition by Medicare as being among the top 1 percent of agencies in Washington. Visit the Uber [Article Directory](#) to get a totally unique version of this article for reprint.

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