

The Important Issues in Homecare | 12 Tips to Help

► Fiona F. Middleton, M.S.M.

Recently, a friend asked me for assistance in finding help for her mother. She was confused, she told me, by the dozens of listings in the telephone book for homecare companies. All claimed to be the best, to offer the highest quality, and to give the best value. What, she asked me, are the *important issues* to which she should pay attention when making her choice? Here is my advice to her, and to others in this situation:

- Use an agency, rather than hiring privately. Hiring privately places the individual receiving care at risk because people often answer private advertisements when they cannot find work with the agencies. With private hires, there is no screening, oversight, checking of identity documents, or insurance coverage, all of which can be expected from a reputable agency.
- Consider the range of services offered by the agency. Non-medical care should include personal care (bathing, dressing, and continence care), not simply handing soap or shampoo to the person who needs care.
- Does the agency have a consumer-driven approach? The agency should be willing to entertain special requests. Dates and times for service should occur based on the client's needs and schedule, not the agency's.
- Is the agency responsive? How quickly the agency can find a caregiver initially is often indicative of the availability and reliability of substitutes. The agency should also be willing to offer replacements if the client is not satisfied with the performance of a caregiver.
- Will the agency ensure the client's continued satisfaction? An initial visit should be conducted in the home of the person who receives care. Ongoing visits and phone calls should continue throughout the duration of the case.
- How affordable is the service, and will the company quote rates on the telephone? Be wary of an agency that will only give rates after seeing you in your home. Watch for any "hidden" fees, for example, extra charges for personal care or light housekeeping.
- Does the agency offer a discounted daily or "live-in" rate, or merely charge the hourly rate multiplied by twenty-four? The cost for a live-in caregiver should be roughly the same as the cost (or less) than one day of care in a nursing home.

(continued)

- Of the total fee charged, how much does the Caregiver receive? More money does not always equate to better services. Some agencies charge more than double the fees that their caregivers earn.
- Does the agency interview the caregivers, or merely process applicants? Interviews should be one-on-one, in-person, and extensive. Ask for samples of the types of questions the agency asks the caregivers. Remember, a group orientation is not a substitute for a fact-finding interview.
- Are references checked, or does the agency merely confirm dates of employment and rehire eligibility? A thorough reference check will include comprehensive discussions with former supervisors to ascertain the caregivers' past behavioral patterns.
- Does the agency conduct statewide criminal background checks? Background checks should be comprehensive, not merely a county check.
- Are health screenings required for the caregivers? A complete medical examination and TB test before referral will reduce risk for the person who receives care.

Shopping for the homecare company that is right for you is as important as buying your first home, selecting the correct university, or choosing your best friend. Research the agency thoroughly and look for a company with a known reputation in the industry. If you make sure you are comfortable with the people with whom you are doing business and all parties should be pleased with the outcome.

For more information call 215 402-0200 or visit us on the web at www.griswoldspecialcare.com. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fiona Middleton, MSM, is the Vice President for *GRISWOLD SPECIAL CARE*, the world's oldest, multinational, non-medical homecare company. Middleton also serves as an adjunct facilitator at Rosemont College, where she teaches courses in communication, human resources, and business. She has authored numerous articles on homecare issues, and frequently appears as a guest speaker on local and national radio.