

## Deciding When Mom and Dad Need Help at Home

Home health care services can dramatically increase the quality of life for your elderly parents. Homecare services can help them maintain their independence but with greater safety, security and healthy living.

Making the decision to bring home care services into your parents lives depends on your parents individual situation such as their overall mental and physical health, their financial situation as well as their local family and friends support network. Here are some questions to consider when deciding if a loved one needs additional help:

- Have there been any major weight changes?
- Is your parent exercising or otherwise staying active? (walking counts)
- Is your parent getting out of the house?
- Does your parent socialize with friends or neighbors?
- Can your parent manage the finances independently?
- Do they pay bills on time?
- If an appliance breaks, can your parent find a repairman and make an appointment?
- Does your parent have trouble climbing steps?
- Does your parent have a plan in the event of a medical emergency or natural disaster?
- Does your parent seem happy or content? Are there any signs of depression?
- Is your parent able to maintain the household independently? (e.g., cooking, cleaning and grocery shopping)?

Perhaps what seemed like a case of the blues over the phone is more serious than you realized initially. Or maybe your mom is more isolated now that she no longer plays bridge. These dilemmas can be remedied with the proper help and support. Every family situation is different. A good rule of thumb is to ask questions whenever there is a departure from your parents usual behavior.

Discuss any issues with your parent. Many elderly people worry about having their independence taken away, so be mindful of your parents sense of dignity when you approach the subject of help at home.

There are different home care services available depending on the level of care needed, including assistance with activities of daily living to advanced in-home medical care.

Medical Home Care Agencies deliver a range of care from companion care such as light house keeping, meal preparation, socialization, and helping with errands to assistance with more hands on care. All service is delivered under the supervision of a Registered Nurse who is also there should any issues arise. Often times they can spot a potential problem before it becomes more serious and can coordinate with the primary care provider to achieve a successful at home treatment plan.

Conversely, there are non medical home care service providers who only focus on

activities of daily living. This is, activities related to housekeeping, running errands, meal preparation and companionship. They do not have licensed nursing assistants or nurses on staff.

Regardless of your parents care situation you should at least ask some basic questions before contracting with any home care company.

Those basic questions are:

- How long has the agency been in business?
- Is the agency evaluated and accredited by an outside body? If so, is their accreditation up to date?
- Does the agency have a state license?
- Do they have a list of references? From both clients as well as physicians in the area.
- Is a care plan created by and directed by a medical professional such as a Registered Nurse?
- Does the agency work in conjunction with other care providers such as the clients primary care physician to ensure cohesive care?