Hiring a Caregiver

Providing home caregiving for a person with Alzheimer's disease can be a challenge. This is especially true if there is no one who can provide regular respite relief, if family members live out of town or need to maintain employment or if the disease extends for many years. When possible, a network of friends, neighbors or fellow church members can provide valuable assistance, but these too may not fulfill the full caregiving needs and are not always available. There are very few volunteer agencies that provide some respite caregiving, but their numbers are very limited. Therefore, most families who are caring for someone with Alzheimer's disease in the home find it necessary to employ a caregiver. This may be for just a brief time, on a part-time basis or full-time.

Hired caregivers come through agencies or work independently. There are several points to consider when deciding which kind of caregiver to hire:

- An agency caregiver will generally cost more than an independent caregiver.
- Agency caregivers are usually licensed, bonded and/or insured.
- Independent caregivers often do not have the same level of insurance or bonding.
- If an agency caregiver cannot show up, the agency can usually send out a replacement.
- If an independent caregiver must be absent there may be a problem.
- An agency caregiver is employed by the agency and is subject to their scrutiny and supervision.
- When an independent caregiver is used, the family becomes the direct employer with all of the accompanying responsibilities for hiring and appropriate government reporting.
- In searching for an independent in-home caregiver, use caution when advertising. You may want to consider contacting local schools (i.e. nursing, occupational therapy) instead.

Suggested Topics to Address When Conducting A Caregiver Employment Interview:

- Determine what days and times the applicant can work.
- Ask how the applicant will get to work [Example: drive, bus, a friend] Determine whether or not it is a dependable method.
- Ask if the caregiver has a back-up plan if for some reason they have difficulty coming for a scheduled shift. [Example: Is there someone else available if a child becomes sick? Is there alternate transportation?]
- What is the caregiver’s work history? What kinds of things have they done?
- Do they have any knowledge about Alzheimer’s disease or experience in the care of someone with Alzheimer’s. Where and when was their Alzheimer’s specific training?
- Explain in detail all duties that are expected to be performed. [Example: Cook meals, change bed linens, do dishes, read to the person, dress the person, answer the phone, light housekeeping, monitor patients smoking, assist the person in toileting, assist with routine medications, care for pets, etc.]
- Make sure that these expectations are fully understood and make sure that there is no problem with what is expected.
- Determine any medical problems that might limit the ability to perform expected tasks. [Example: Allergy to pets, back problems, etc.]
- Inform the caregiver about any house rules you may have. [Example: No smoking, no shoes on carpet, no visitors, etc.]
- How would you handle...? (ask specific questions about how they would handle resistance or withdrawn behavior)
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Suggested Topics to Address When Conducting A Caregiver Employment Interview: (continued)

- Describe in detail how Alzheimer’s disease is currently affecting the patient. (i.e. She may try to leave the house, is easily frustrated, etc.]

- State clearly whether the caregiver will be terminated if scheduled work is missed.

- State clearly how much you want or are willing to pay per hour, per day or per shift. State how and when these payments will be made.

- **ASK FOR REFERENCES AND CHECK THEM!**
  Two work related and one personal reference.

Suggested Questions To Ask References:

- How long have you known the applicant? Dates? In what relationship?

- What was his/her position?

- Can you tell me more about his/her responsibilities?

- How did the person get along with you and with senior adults?

- What were your impressions of him/her as a worker?

- Did he/she show initiative?

- Was the person reliable/dependable?

- What were the applicant’s strengths? Weaknesses?

- How did the applicant handle stressful situations?

- Did you find him/her trustworthy and honest?

- Were you aware of any problems with drugs/alcohol?

- Is he/she still working for you? If not, would you re-hire?

- Describe the job situation and ask the reference if they think the applicant would be a good match for the position.

- On a scale of 1 – 10, how well does he/she do in doing activities with individuals with Alzheimer’s disease?

Once an applicant is offered the job and accepts, a contract should be signed before the worker starts.

Each party should have a copy of the signed contract. Consider a trial period. Draw up a contract agreement detailing rate of pay, days and hours of employment. Clarify any fringe benefits: (i.e. bus fare). Clarify your rights as a caregiver (i.e. caregiver can do surprise visit; caregiver can investigate anything the person with Alzheimer’s says about the companion).

When you become an employer there are a number of items you may need to check out.

- Ask your insurance agent about your homeowner’s liability coverage as it applies to someone in your employment.

- Contact the IRS for information about social security withholding. Federal law requires withholding taxes be paid for domestic employees who receive more than $50 per quarter.

- Be aware of possible legal and financial pitfalls of paying in cash instead of by check. Use receipt forms or other proof of payments to worker.

- Keep a record of any serious problems you have with your worker, in case of a dispute later.