

GUIDE TO HOME HEALTH CARE

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This *Guide to Home Health Care* is designed to be a practical source of information about your home health care. It gives you a profile of the various members of your care team. It provides answers to many of the questions that patients and their families have about preventing infection, home safety, patients' rights and advance directives. We have also included forms at the back of this *Guide* and online.

You should know three things about the *Guide* you are holding:

First, the goals here are simple – to inform you about home health, and to give you insights and skills that will support you in your role as either a home health patient or a family caregiver. The more you understand about home health care – i.e., the more informed you are as a home health patient or family caregiver, the more you will be able to take full advantage of the services and support that home health offers.

Second, this *Guide* is just one part of the patient and caregiver education your home health team offers. Take advantage of other training and support opportunities. Ask questions whenever you are unsure of something. If it's useful to you, mark this *Guide* with a highlighter or underlining, or write notes in the margin.

Third, although this *Guide* starts as a printed publication, it doesn't stop there. It also includes an online supplement where you may download or print additional copies of the forms at the back.

Whether you are a patient or a caregiver, we hope you will find this *Guide* a valuable source of information. Please use it as an organizing tool during your home health care experience.

Forms Online. For information on how to access the online supplement, please turn to page 41 (the inside back cover.)

INFORMATION FOR GETTING STARTED

What is Home Health Care

“Home health care” refers to services ordered by your physician as part of treatment for your illness or medical condition. Home health care is delivered by a team of professionals who visit the patient and the patient’s family caregiver at home. The family caregiver is a key member of the home care team. An important part of the role of the home health professionals is providing information, training, and support to the patient and his or her family caregiver.

Typical home health services **INCLUDE**: intermittent visiting nurse, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech pathology therapy, and medical social work; and an intermittent home health aide.

Home health services typically **DO NOT INCLUDE**: custodial or long term care; private duty nursing care; or personal care services, such as help with housekeeping or meal preparation.

Your home health clinicians will work with you and your physician to develop a care plan tailored to your specific needs and situation.

The Home Health Team

Home health care is patient centered, which means that the patient makes care decisions and participates in care planning as much as possible. The patient’s primary home caregiver is also an important part of the home health team. So is the patient’s physician, who continues to direct medical aspects of the patient’s care. In addition, a home health team typically includes:

Home health nurse

Home health nurses will visit with you and your family to determine your individualized needs and work out what services you are interested in receiving. The nurse’s primary goal is to provide symptom management and comfort. Your home health nurse, who may be a Registered Nurse (RN) or Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN), may:

- Assess your condition and develop a plan of care with you and your physician;
- Perform procedures such as placing and maintaining catheters, wound care, blood draws, etc.;

- Teach you and your caregiver the proper use of catheters, routine dressing changes, medication, and other self-care;
- Make suggestions and help you obtain needed equipment and services;
- Discuss the effects of illness and treatment;
- Listen to your concerns and offer support.

Social workers

Social workers work under and are supervised by the home care nurse. A social worker may be available to help the patient and family create and maintain a supportive, in-home care setting that will work in terms of the patient's safety and comfort. The social worker may also be available to help patient and family deal with personal, financial, emotional and care planning issues that come up. A social worker may also be able to:

- Identify community resources and help with referrals to them;
- Assist in applying for state and local assistance programs;
- Clarify insurance coverage and answer questions regarding financial concerns;
- Help patients and families arrange for added caregiving support at home or in an alternative care setting;
- Provide information concerning advance directives, such as a health care directive (living will) and appointment of a health care representative or proxy;
- Listen to your concerns and provide emotional support;
- Provide counseling with patient/families for decision-making and coping with illness;
- Provide individual and family conference opportunities.

Therapists - Physical Therapist (PT), Occupational Therapist (OTR), Physical Therapy Assistant (PTA), Speech Pathologist (ST).

Therapists often play a role during home care in promoting the independence, quality of life, and safety of the patient and family. The home health nurse can help determine if a referral to one of these therapists might be helpful. The therapist may:

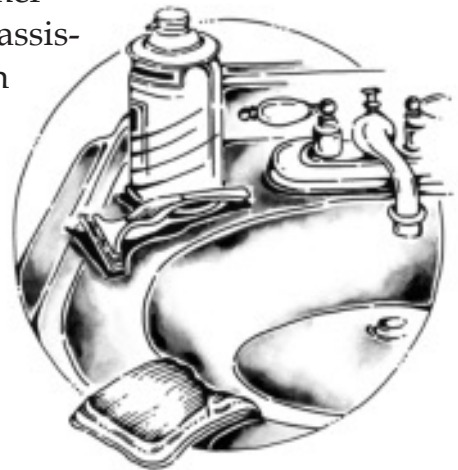
- Assess your condition and develop a plan of care with you and your physician;
- Evaluate strength and range of motion and help the patient maximize strength and mobility through the use of equipment and exercise programs;
- Evaluate the medical equipment needs;

- Provide or assist in arranging for equipment as needed, such as hand held showers, bath seats, walkers and canes;
- Train family and caregivers in proper use of needed medical equipment;
- Identify safety hazards;
- Evaluate leisure interests and teach skills and activities to improve quality of life;
- Teach transfer skills and energy-saving techniques to maintain safety for the patient and caregivers;
- Teach family and caregivers exercises for the bed bound patient that may relieve pain and discomfort caused by lack of mobility;
- Evaluate communication or swallowing difficulties and recommend ways of handling these;
- Discuss the effects of illness and treatment;
- Listen to your concerns and offer support.

Home health aides

Home Health Aides are registered nursing assistants who work closely with and are supervised by the nurses and other home health team members, providing some assistance with personal care needs. Depending on your situation, some of the services they may provide include:

- Bathing the patient and changing bed linens;
- Shampooing, grooming and shaving;
- Skin care;
- Assistance with activities of daily living;
- Assistance with exercise and mobility.



Home infusion

Home infusion therapy refers to intravenous (usually called “IV”) administration of medication to a patient receiving care at home. If your physician prescribes home infusion, a nurse or other trained clinician will participate in the delivery of your home health care in connection with the insertion and management of IV lines. They will also provide education and support to both the patient and family, with respect to receiving infusion therapy at home.

The Role of a Family Caregiver

To be effective, home health care depends on the participation and active involvement of a family or home caregiver. To fill this role you do not need to be a trained or experienced caregiver – but you must be willing and able to learn a basic set of caregiver skills. Part of the job of the professional home health team is to work with you to give you the know-how and confidence you will need in your role as caregiver.

If you are considering taking on the role of family caregiver for a loved one in need of home health care, talk with a member of the home health team. Find out what's expected and what kinds of help and support are available. If you can, talk with others who have done this. What were the challenges they faced? What suggestions would they have? Would they do it again?

Becoming a home caregiver is a serious personal commitment. It is not for everyone. But for those who choose it, it offers many unique rewards to both patient and caregiver. Take time to make a good decision for yourself and your loved one.

Paying for Home Health Care

Medicare. There are a number of conditions that must be met before Medicare will pay for home health care:

You must be **Homebound**. You are considered homebound if: (1) you are unable to leave home; (2) leaving home requires a considerable and taxing effort; or (3) leaving home requires the assistance of another. Medicare coverage for home health services depends on the patient being confined to home and therefore unable to obtain health care outside the home. (However, infrequent absences from the home that are of short duration – such as to attend church or see a hairdresser – normally do not prevent a person from being considered homebound.)

You must need **Skilled Services**. A skilled service is a service which must be provided by a licensed professional (nurse, therapist or social worker). In determining whether a service requires the skills of a licensed professional, we consider the inherent complexity of the service, the condition of the patient, and general standards of practice in the community.

Your care needs must be **Intermittent**, which means Medicare will not pay for our staff to stay with you for an extended period of time.

Care must be provided in your **Place of Residence**: home, adult family home, assisted living facility – but not a nursing home.