

Home Health Care

Home health care is a term used to describe a variety of health and social services that are provided in the homes of individuals who are disabled or ill. Home health care is often the best option for people who prefer to be at home but whose health care needs cannot be met by visits to health care facilities and assistance from family and friends. To receive home care through Medicare, an individual must be eligible for Medicare and under a physician's care and either be homebound and require medically necessary skilled nursing or therapy services or require hospice services.

The April 24, 2002, issue of *JAMA* contains an article about maximizing patients' functional independence in home health care.



HOME HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

Home health care providers are licensed professionals who provide a range of services in the homes of people receiving home health care.

- **Physicians** diagnose and treat medical conditions and supervise care, including recommending other professional services that may be needed.
- **Nurses** provide other medical care that requires special training, such as intravenous treatment, wound care, injections, and education about managing medical diseases and conditions.
- **Physical therapists** use specialized equipment and exercises to improve muscle strength, flexibility, and mobility.
- **Speech pathologists** help improve the communication skills of patients affected by a stroke or surgery and can assist with improving breathing and swallowing functions.
- **Occupational therapists** provide help in improving activities of daily living such as bathing, dressing, and eating and provide equipment to make activities easier.
- **Dietitians** evaluate patients' dietary needs based on their illnesses and recommend appropriate diet plans.
- **Home health aides** assist patients in performing their daily activities.
- **Homemakers** provide help with household tasks such as cooking, doing laundry, cleaning, and shopping.
- **Companions** can assist patients who should not be left home alone by supervising patients and providing companionship.
- **Volunteers** can provide a variety of services depending on their training and skills.

To find certified home health care professionals, check with your local Medicare or Medicaid office, or contact one of the listed agencies. It is important that care be provided by licensed, reliable staff.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
410/786-3000
www.cms.hhs.gov
- Administration on Aging
(US Department of Health and Human Services)
800/677-1116
www.aoa.dhhs.gov
- National Association for Home Care
202/547-7424
www.nahc.org

INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page Index on JAMA's Web site at www.jama.com. A page on palliative care was published in the February 20, 2002, issue, one on hospice care in the February 21, 2001, issue, and one on the stresses of being a caregiver in the December 15, 1999, issue.

Sources: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, National Association for Home Care, National Institute on Aging, US Department of Health and Human Services, World Health Organization

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