**When a Loved One Needs Home Care, Consider These Tips to Find the Right Match**

November is National Home Care Month, a time to help the public understand the role of home care services and how to obtain those services when they are needed.

Home care includes skilled professional nursing and therapies, home health aides, and other supports delivered to patients in their own homes. My organization, *[INSERT AGENCY NAME]*, has *[INSERT NUMBER OF STAFF]* of these committed staff who travel throughout the *[INSERT NAME OF YOUR REGION]* region to provide medical, social and supportive services to *[INSERT YOUR NUMBER OF PATIENTS]* individuals in the community.

These services include the full complement of care to manage medical episodes or ongoing care needs, prevent hospitalizations as well as help patients recuperate after being in the hospital.

Importantly, home care helps patients avoid an episode where the condition that brought them to the hospital in the first place could potentially result in them returning to the hospital. These services can include in-home wound care following surgery or therapy and aide services after a joint replacement procedure that needs attention to avoid a fall in the home or other health and safety risk.

Home care also provides services to help individuals age-in-place or safely remain at home with a disabling condition, as an alternative to the nursing home if long term is needed.

As the population ages, and as home care providers step up to meet state and federal health care goals, home care’s work is becoming ever more important and varied.

Home care agencies are implementing vital sepsis protocols to stem the tide of life-threatening sepsis, which occurs in the home or community in 80 to 90 percent of cases. This condition kills more than a quarter-million individuals each year and costs the health care system $27 billion dollars annually. It is just one of several conditions – from congestive heart failure to hypertension to diabetes management and more – where home care is working to address avoidable hospitalizations and life-altering health risks.

Home care providers are also working to network with physicians and other medical practices on public health measures and to address social factors that affect patients, including through a new law that is designed to bring home care providers and mental health professionals together to address non-medical factors that affect care outcomes.

When a patient is discharged from the hospital, his or her first thought is often “what now?”

Hospital discharge planners help to provide options for care at home, through an agency like [INSERT YOUR ORGANIZATION’s NAME], but it’s important to know what to expect and how to arrange services for that vital transition home. The same questions arise when a family member notices that a loved one is experiencing mental decline or mobility and self-care problems and may need the supports and services of a home care provider.

One way to think of it is F.I.N.D. (Find, Insurance, Needs, and Discuss):

* Find a provider who serves your county. Your local social service district or area office on aging can help. Once you’ve identified a state-licensed or certified agency, call the provider’s intake department and be prepared to answer questions.
* Insurance – Do you have private insurance, Medicaid or Medicare? Each of these will cover home care differently. Medicare typically covers short-term services where a nurse or therapist is necessary, and the patient must be homebound, meaning it is difficult for them to leave home without assistance. Medicare home health services also require the patient to be seen by a doctor first who must sign a certification of the doctor visit and an assessment of eligibility. Medicaid covers long term care and has no “homebound” requirement.
* Needs – Do you need long-term eldercare, do you need medical support after leaving a hospital, or do you have a disabling condition?
* Discuss – Once you’ve identified your needs, it will be helpful to discuss these factors the home care provider to determine a care plan, which may need to be coordinated and approved by your doctor.

This process can seem overwhelming, especially during a time of medical crisis or the urgent need for services. Most importantly, keep the lines of communication open, ask questions of your provider and rely on their expertise to work with your doctor on a treatment plan necessary for your individual needs.

If you have questions about home care in [INSERT YOUR REGION], contact [INSERT YOUR ORGANIZATION’S NAME]’s intake department at [INSERT PHONE NUMBER].