

Alzheimer's Care Needs Increasing Exponentially

Caregivers need to know when to hire additional help

By Michael Jones CSA

There are now more than five million people in the United States living with Alzheimer's disease, which is a 10 percent increase from the previous nationwide estimate. With Alzheimer's disease moving up to the seventh leading cause of death in the country and the fifth leading cause of death for those over 65, more and more Americans are providing care for a loved one suffering from the disease.

Most of us know that the greatest risk factor for Alzheimer's is increasing age. With 78 million baby boomers beginning to turn 60 last year, the elderly population in every state is continuing to grow faster than the total population.

The US Census Bureau estimates that the growth in the 65-and-older population will be about 3½ times the growth of the nation as a whole. This trend indicates that by mid-century, the number of people with Alzheimer's will grow to as many as 16 million, more than the current total population of New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Houston combined.

For many families, Alzheimer's care begins and ends at home. Caring for a loved one with the disease is a difficult task even for the most educated, patient, and able-bodied person. Alzheimer's disease causes people to do things they normally wouldn't do if they didn't have the disease.

Caring for Alzheimer's at Home

Recent medical research indicates the stress associated with caregiving can lead to a weakened immune system and in some cases take years off the caregiver's life. Those risks increase when they have to manage caregiving responsibilities while also working or raising a family.

Caregiving for a loved one with Alzheimer's brings unique challenges. In some cases, a loved one can become violent; hitting those that are trying to care for them, but you must remember that they don't know that they are behaving that way. *Nothing the patient does or says should be taken personally.*

Another major obstacle of providing Alzheimer's care at home is that normal household items can become dangerous to those afflicted with the disease. The house should be configured and made safe for people with the disease in the same way you would safe guard against a small child living the house. People with Alzheimer's can cut themselves with kitchen knives, burn themselves on the stove, or they could simply wander outside.

Caregiving for a loved one with Alzheimer's is a huge responsibility. There is a risk of emotional burnout and a decline in health for family caregivers who do not make it a point to take much needed breaks. For many, finding respite care is the best solution.

Basic Considerations When Hiring In-Home Alzheimer's Help

Finding in-home Alzheimer's assistance can be an overwhelming task. Tackling this need in an organized way is the key to making in-home Alzheimer's support feasible. The following tips may help your family and caregiver find the help needed.

1. *Identify Job Details* – Identify the specific functions you expect the help to perform to eliminate confusion. Details such as dressing the client, bathing, and eating need to be addressed. Other considerations include grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning and laundry, as well as transportation. Also share the client's needs for socializing and companionship.
2. *What Kind of Person Should You Look For?* – Some qualifications you may require are: certified health care worker, Home Health Aide, a licensed driver, experienced in operating special equipment, and experienced in handling clients with Alzheimer's disease.
3. *Some questions you should considering asking*
 - What did your duties consist of?
 - What was your daily schedule?
 - What were your responsibilities?

Perhaps the best advice you should come away with is to conduct the search for in-home Alzheimer's help in a businesslike manner. You will get the best-qualified, most professional help in caring for your family.

Outside Agency Help

Most people hope to age safely and comfortably in their own home, including those managing Alzheimer's. Many Alzheimer's patients can safely stay in their own home for a period of time, and that's where organizations like Comfort Keepers® can provide in-home care assistance.

Many in-home care providers, like Comfort Keepers, have been formally trained by local chapters of the Alzheimer's Association in how to provide in-home care for Alzheimer's disease clients. This training includes:

- Assisting the client with dressing or grooming
- Aiding the client in communication
- Improving eating habits with healthy meal planning
- Enhancing home safety by implementing measures to prevent wandering or driving
- And....much needed respite care for family members who may be primary care providers for the Alzheimer's patient.

Help for Alzheimer's Home Caregivers

One of the hardest things to do is to watch your loved one slowly slip away. To add to all the stresses of Alzheimer's home care, it causes emotional, physical, and financial stress. Know what support is available and how to take care of yourself as a caregiver.

There are several things you can do to help alleviate the stress related to Alzheimer's home care. They include:

- *Family support and education* – Learn how to adjust to personality changes and know what to expect. Get involved with local organizations to learn typical behaviors and how to manage the disease.
- *Learn to communicate with an Alzheimer's patient* – Often the Alzheimer's patient remembers the past more easily than the present. Learn to communicate on a level that is easy for them to understand.
- *Use therapeutic activities* – Music therapy, former hobbies, pets, and establishing routines can help to alleviate the stress caused by the behavior of an Alzheimer's patient.
- *Good health can help reduce the symptoms of Alzheimer's* – Reducing the symptoms of Alzheimer's is reliant on good health. Making sure the Alzheimer's client has a good nutritional diet and gets regular exercise are two of the most important factors for effective home care.

It is estimated that someone in America develops Alzheimer's every 72 seconds. Help is available for those caring for an individual with the disease. For more information, contact your local Alzheimer's Association chapter by visiting www.alz.org.

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About Comfort Keepers

Founded in 1998 by a registered home health care nurse and her husband, the Comfort Keepers franchise system has grown to over 550 offices worldwide. Comfort Keepers has ranked as one of the top three franchises in senior care *Entrepreneur Magazine's* Franchise 500 for the past five years. For more information about Comfort Keepers, visit www.comfortkeepers.com. Each office is independently owned and operated.

