

# HOME CARE: THE LOWDOWN

Top tips on what to look out for when hiring home help *By Aisling Kennedy*

**DID YOU  
KNOW?**

There are over 490,000 people over the age of 65 in Ireland and around five per cent of these require long term care

## ESSENTIAL INFORMATION TO KNOW

### Is there any kind of government relief scheme for families trying to afford carers for their loved ones?

Yes you can apply for the Home Care Package which is funding from the HSE through public health nurses and social workers. However, this support is limited, as it is means-tested.

The scheme is aimed mainly at those requiring medium to high caring support to continue to live at home independently.

If you do not qualify for the Home Care Package, then private home care is available. Here if a member of the family is working, they can claim back tax credits up to the 41 per cent tax bracket.

### What are the main elderly care organisations in Ireland?

Age Action, Carers Association, Centre for Independent Living, Irish Private Home Care Association.

### Are there any care lines/help lines for the elderly if they feel they are not receiving the treatment they need?

There is the Senior Help Line – 1850 440 444. This is a confidential listening service for older people by older people.

Looking into getting home help? Whether it's for you or for someone you love it's generally accepted that older people and their families have a preference for home care over being admitted into a home. Many older people have the desire and ability to continue to live an active, independent and engaged life and this desire means people want to be able to live in their own homes as well as participating in all aspects of life and society for as long as possible. Home care can be quite affordable for families so it's a handy alternative to a retirement home.

However, inviting a complete stranger into your home and into your everyday life can be a daunting task and is something everyone concerned wants to get right. It's very important that you and your family are rigorous in how you make the choice about who is going to provide the home care.

We spoke to Bob Power, owner of Comfort Keepers about his home help

business and asked him what to look out for when looking for home help.

**1 Ask if the home care provider is a company or an agency** This is important to know as agencies do not employ the carers but charge a finder's fee. This means that you have to look after insurance, PAYE, PRSI, maternity leave, holiday pay etc. Also, it's a good idea to ensure that the company is a member of a trade association which enforces minimum standards of training etc on its members. In Ireland, that organisation is the Irish Private Home Care Association.

**2 Do you have a 24 hour support service?** 24-hour support service is essential for carers and for clients as a back-up. If the client is in distress then the carer can ring the support service. The support service can then contact next of kin, the GP, emergency services, and talk the carer through actions required.

Also the client can ring the support service at any time with any query. This is especially important at weekends if the care time is to be changed.

**3 Ask for information about your care providers services and fees** This will do more than help you compare services and fees. The quality of the informational materials you receive may indicate the attention a home care provider gives to all aspects of its operations. Also ask for references when your carer arrives to the home and also ask about whether or not your carer has had rigorous induction training for carers.

**4 If the service is cancelled do we pay until the end of the month?** This is an issue to be aware of, especially if the service might be cancelled from time to time. You shouldn't have to commit to a level of care that you may not need. Flexibility is key to good home care.

**5 Are the carers supervised and if so, how are they supervised?** Home care organisations make regular quality assurance calls and visits to make sure carers consistently deliver quality care. To further ensure quality care, see that all carers are regularly and closely supervised by a Client Care Manager. It is important for you or your loved ones' safety that the carer is supervised and supported by experienced health and social care professionals.

**6 Will you provide a home assessment prior to starting**

**services?** A thorough home consultation with the client and their family, a representative of a home care provider can discover needs and help you determine whether the organisation can meet them to your satisfaction. No organisation should say a definite "yes" on the phone without assessing your individual needs and ensuring they have the means to fulfil them.

**7 Ask how the home provider selects their carers** Home care is very personal. The person matters. Look for providers that balance experience and training with a person's innate gift to serve and care for others. No amount of experience makes up for a lack of true compassion. It is also essential that providers thoroughly screen and interview candidates. This should include Garda Vetting



*It is essential providers thoroughly screen and interview home care candidates*

and other background checks, such as a Sex Offenders Check and Driving Convictions. Many organisations even consider carrying out personality assessments (which can identify people who possess care-giving qualities), as well as interviews and reference checks. When choosing your care provider, also look for organisations that provide training to candidates who pass the screening process and require that carers, once hired, complete ongoing training to maintain and update their skills.

**8 Check to see that the care giver is adequately insured?** Ensure the agency you choose has coverage to protect your loved one and your family. The provider should carry professional and employer liability insurance.

**9 Ask if they will provide a written care plan before you begin with their service** This is really important. A written care plan prevents misunderstandings. You can use it for reference when calling the home care provider with concerns. To be effective, the plan needs to be developed with your input and needs to be flexible so it can be updated as your loved one's needs change.

**10 What if I am not satisfied with the care giver assigned to me or a loved one?** Home care providers will assign a new carer when a match does not work out. They should understand that having someone in your home is a very intimate thing and you have to feel some bond. **WW**

## ABOUT COMFORT KEEPERS:

- Comfort Keepers are the first and only home care provider in the country to be awarded the Q Mark and all their Client Care Managers are qualified nurses or come from a social care background.
- All trainers are trained in house and the training is nationally recognised by FETAC or by FAS.
- Care can be cancelled or amended with 24 hours notice. So you are not locked into a contract and can tailor to meet your needs as they change.
- They use a telemonitoring system which ensures that carers are there when they say they are i.e. they log in when they arrive using a freephone number and log out when they are finished. An alarm is raised if the carer fails to log in which is responded to immediately, so the client is never left without care. Managers also do a review with carers and clients every three months to ensure that proper care is provided.
- As all of their carers are employed directly by Comfort Keepers, their clients can claim tax relief at up to 41 per cent if their loved one is incapacitated.