

How to pick a caregiver? By Kathy Laufer, LICSW

There may come a time when you or a family member will require some assistance from an outside caregiver. It is helpful to seek needed assistance prior to a crisis – when you have the time to make an appropriate choice. The first step is to determine what kind of caregiver is needed. In November 2002, **The Golden Times** published an article describing different types of home care personnel. You can talk with your doctor or other healthcare providers to determine the level of care needed.

Once you have determined the kind of help needed, how do you find and hire a qualified caregiver? There are two options: hire privately or go through a Home Health/Home Care Agency. There are advantages and disadvantages of both. If you want to hire privately, you will need to recruit a qualified individual. You may be able to find someone through word of mouth. If not you can post a job notice at your church, temple, or synagogue; check with your Area Agency on Aging (Springwell); or advertise in the newspaper. Once you find someone, you will need to verify certification (for health care personnel such as home health aide) or professional license. With permission of the person, you should conduct a background check. There are services that provide a background check for a fee ranging from \$15 - \$90. You may find that hiring privately costs less on an hourly basis (between 20 – 40% less). However, if you are the employer, you will need to consider issues of taxes, social security, liability and worker's compensation. One note of caution, under-the-table pay arrangements may have dire tax consequences. The IRS publication "Household Employer's Tax Guide" reviews the regulations. Remember that if you withhold taxes and social security for the employee, you may be able to deduct the aide's salary on the elder's tax return.

If you decide to go through a Home Health/Home Care agency, it is helpful to shop around. Each agency has its own rates and practices. Certified home health agencies have nurses who supervise the home health aides. Most agencies check certifications, licenses, criminal record, and references. The agencies usually provide liability insurance, workman's compensation for accidents on the job and insurance to protect you against theft or damages. An agency can also provide you with a back-up person.

Once you have decided which route to take and the type of care needed, you will want to set up an interview at home. You are looking for someone who is kind, compassionate, competent and reliable. You will want to ask about their experience. Ask about any special training (ex. CPR and first aid). [If you are hiring privately, be sure to get at least one reference from a former client.] Observe the person with you or your family member. Does she smile? Talk directly with the elder, or include her in the conversation? How does she talk about her own family? Does she seek out information about your needs? Is this person someone you can welcome into your home? You may want to suggest a trial period to see if it's a good match for both parties.

The process of hiring the right caregiver may seem complicated. It is worthwhile spending the extra time to do it right. When in doubt, ask for assistance.