

Home Healthcare Meeting Kit

WHAT IS HOME HEALTHCARE

Home healthcare is healthcare provided in the client's home. Home healthcare workers provide hands-on long-term care and personal assistance to clients with disabilities or other chronic conditions. These workers, who may be home health aides, personal/home care aides, companions, nursing assistants or home health nurses, are employed in patients' homes and in community-based services such as group homes.

HAZARDS OF HOME HEALTHCARE

Home healthcare workers may be employed by a home care agency or may be self-employed independent contractors working directly for patients. They have little control over their work environment which may contain a number of safety and health hazards. These hazards include bloodborne pathogens and biological hazards, latex sensitivity, ergonomic hazards from patient lifting, violence, hostile animals and unhygienic and dangerous conditions. In addition, if their daily work schedule requires them to provide care for multiple patients, they face hazards on the road as they drive from home to home.

Other safety precautions

Needles. Family members and patients may leave syringes and lancets exposed. This puts healthcare workers at risk of an accidental needlestick.

Infection. Depending on the patient's health, homecare workers may be exposed to transmission-based diseases. The presence of blood and bodily fluids can also pose a risk of infection.

Ergonomics. Transferring, bathing, and dressing patients can cause musculoskeletal disorders if workers don't position themselves properly. Mechanical lifting devices can help, but may not be

available. Additionally, patient rooms may be small and the beds non-adjustable—which can result in working in awkward positions.

HOW IS HOME HEALTH CARE STARTED?

Doctor's orders are needed to start care. Once your doctor refers you for home health services, the home health agency will schedule an appointment and come to your home to talk to you about your needs and ask you some questions about your health.

THE KIND OF HEALTH SERVICES PROVIDED

Depending on their training and job duties, they help patients with activities of daily living such as meals, bathing, dressing and housekeeping, and may perform clinical tasks such as medication administration, wound care, blood pressure readings and range of motion exercises.

Specific Examples:

- Wound care for pressure sores or a surgical wound
- Patient and caregiver education
- Intravenous or nutrition therapy
- Injections
- Monitoring serious illness and unstable health status

BEST PRACTICES FOR HOME HEALTHCARE WORKERS

Without the same safety precautions as a healthcare facility, the presence of injury exposures is more likely in a home. For example, loose carpeting, furniture, cluttered walkways, and even the presence of pets can pose trip hazards. In addition, pets can bite, scratch, or become aggressive.

To minimize the risk of infection, practice standard precautions. These include:

- Use of personal protective equipment (e.g. gloves, gowns, and respirators)
- Proper handwashing
- Proper handling of needles

Tips for keeping employees safe on the job

- Never use materials that are stored in unlabeled containers.
- Use only household strength cleaners; read and follow the instructions.
- Handle oxygen tanks carefully by storing them upright, secured to a cart or wall, and in well-ventilated areas. Be sure to keep sources of flame away from oxygen and don't allow smoking in the same room.

Workers Beware

Employees also need to be aware of their surroundings for personal safety. Visiting unfamiliar neighborhoods, entering private homes, and handling patients with behavior problems can put in-home workers at risk. Employees need to keep in contact with you so you know where they are at all times. Have employees program your number and local emergency numbers into their phone and remind employees not to enter a home if they see weapons that are not locked up, aggressive animals, or other security threats.

MORE DILIGENCE MEASURES FOR WORKERS

Employees have to evaluate a client's home. This includes ensuring the presence of safety devices such as smoke detectors and fire extinguishers. It also includes knowing where the exits are in case an evacuation is necessary as well as how to identify trip hazards, the presence of needles, and other hazards. Develop a plan to address these and other hazards with the client to help ensure a safe workplace.

For workers who need a mechanical lift to help move a patient training on its safe operation is required.

Proper ergonomic controls that employees need include the following:

- Proper lifting techniques
- Use of body mechanics and lift-assist equipment to help avoid injury
- Regular stretching before and during the work shift

FINAL WORD

Personal safety is very important in-home healthcare. Visiting patients in the community, entering private homes, and handling patients with behavior problems all put you at risk. Get training in handling violent behavior. Maintain communication with your employer so they know where you are at all times. Program local emergency numbers into your cell phone and keep it handy at all times. Do not enter a home that has loose weapons, aggressive animals, or other security threats.