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Respite Care - Evaluating and Selecting Services

This issue of the newsletter provides an overview of respite care for the caregiver and highlights useful information and resources.

Throughout our lives, we work, spend time alone or with friends, and take time for leisure. Most of us are not used to spending 24 hours a day with another person. When you are faced with Alzheimer's disease and become a caregiver, you may have to juggle this new role along with many other responsibilities. Respite care — a short time of rest or relief — can give you time to deal with personal needs and meet other responsibilities.

Respite care is provided in many ways:

- in a home, community organization or residential facility.
- for part of the day, evening or overnight.
- by paid staff, volunteers, family or friends.
- occasional or on a regular schedule

In-home Respite Care

In home respite care is one of the ways Alzheimer families get the help they need to cope with the many challenges of caregiving. Services are provided in your home and help both the caregiver and the person with dementia. In-home services can include:

- **Companion services:** help with supervision, recreational activities and visiting.

- **Personal care services:** assistance with bathing.
- **Homemaker services:** help with housekeeping, shopping and meal preparation.
- **Skilled care services:** help with medication and other medical services.

Families can employ in-home helpers privately, through a local agency or as part of a government program. In your search for respite care, remember to explore informal options such as the help of a friend, family member, or neighbor.

Costs, level of training and available services vary among workers and agencies. Medicare does not pay for respite care services. Investigate financial assistance options that may be available through a state or federal program (i.e. Medicaid, Veteran's Administration).

Some respite care helpers may have received training about Alzheimer's disease and the unique needs of a person with the dementia. It is important for you to determine if the in-home helper is somewhat knowledgeable or at least willing to learn about Alzheimer's disease

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What is Respite Care? (continued from page 1)

and effective approaches to care.

Selecting the Respite Care Service

Before you select an in-home helper, arrange a time to meet with the person in your home. Ask questions to get to know the person. What is your impression of the helper and his/her skills? You must feel comfortable with the person who will be coming into your home.

Here are some questions you can ask:

- Why are you interested in this job?
- What is your training?
- What are your past/current home care experiences?
- Have you ever worked with someone with dementia?
- How would you handle...?
(give examples of behaviors or challenges)
- Do you have any special skills, i.e. activities?
- When/how often are you available? Do you have back-up if you are unable to come?
- Are you bonded?
- Who can I talk with at your agency if I have a concern?
- Tell me about yourself? Interests? Hobbies?
- Why did you leave your last job?

Always ask for and check references. Be specific about the needs and characteristics of the person who needs care. If appropriate, include the person with dementia in the interview process or at least have him/her meet and interact with the helper. Share with the helper what is expected of him/her and also share your concerns. Interview several helpers if necessary to find the right person for your particular situation.

Evaluating the Service

It is very important to evaluate the service you use periodically. Your needs may change over time and the helper or facility you are using may no longer be suitable. Sometimes the agency is no longer able to meet your needs. In either case, you will want to find a different service to assist you with your care responsibilities.

Remember, any respite care service may not be perfect. Transitions take time and are a challenge for everyone. But the situation should improve and become more comfortable. Try not to give up too soon. Allow enough time for everyone to adjust to the changes.

For the Caregiver: What to do with YOUR time?

Now that you have time for yourself, you may want to spend some of this time:

Getting Things Done. Go grocery shopping. Go to the bank. Run errands. Take care of all those little things you have put off.

Caring for Yourself. Visit friends, see a movie or go to a museum. Take time to do things you enjoy. Relax, rest and refresh yourself.

Being an Individual. You are more than just a caregiver. You will not be in this role forever and it is important to maintain your past and current friendships and interests.

Adapted from the *Respite Care Guide: How to Find What's Right for You*, the Alzheimer's Association, 1995.

Remember, your health and well being are important. The healthier you are, the better able you are to deal with the demands and responsibilities of caring for a person with dementia.

If you want additional information about respite care or have questions about respite care services in your area, please call the chapter office.