

STAFF SAFETY IN HOME CARE

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Content:

*Overview of workplace safety in home care *Personal Safety tips for making home care visits safely

References:

American Nurse Journal Volume 15, Number 5, May 2020- Home Care Safety-By Tina M. Marrelli, MSN, MA, RN, FAAN, and Nathalie Rennell, MSN, RN, CNE;

NIOSH [2014]. Caring for yourself while caring for others. Cincinnati, OH: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 2015-103;

DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 2010-125 January 2010 Occupational Hazards in Home Healthcare

Workplace safety is important in any work setting, and in the workplace setting of home care, each client's home environment and care needs are unique to the individual. Home care workers have little control over their work environment and must juggle being a guest in a client's home and maintaining a safe work environment. As an In-home aide, it is important to be aware of your personal safety and to be able to identify and report safety concerns.

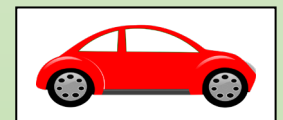
This newsletter will cover tips on worker safety in home care. As a home care employee, it is important to know your agency's policies and procedures related to your personal safety. Discuss safety policies and procedures with your supervisor. Remember to notify your supervisor at any time you feel a client's home is unsafe and talk with your supervisor about how to report unsafe situations. Ask if your agency reviews verbally and in writing with the client and family their responsibilities to provide a safe work environment to a home care worker.

In an article from the *American Nurse Journal* Volume 15, Number 5, entitled *Home Care Safety* it states " Home care safety can be divided into three responsibilities: workers' responsibility to protect their own safety, agency and organization responsibility to train workers and provide safety practices in the workplace, and patient and family responsibility to promote home care team member safety."

Preparing for the visit- Ask for information such as directions, where to park, where to enter the home, who will greet you, and if any pets are in the home. Discuss any changes in your planned schedule with your supervisor. When you make the home visit, explain what you are there to do and ask for permission to touch the client and begin care. Be respectful of the client's home and belongings and ask for permission to move items. Set the professional nature of the home visit. You are a guest in the home, and you are there to provide a service. Show professionalism in your dress code and when speaking with the client and family. Remember to think things through before doing them and think about safety throughout the visit.

Driving to and between client's homes and back can pose safety risks for a home care worker. Consider taking a driver safety course. Find out if your employer has a program they recommend. Safe driving tips include:

- ➔ Use seatbelts.
- ➔ Don't use cell phones while driving.
- ➔ Avoid other distracting activities, such as eating, drinking, or adjusting noncritical vehicle controls, like the radio, while driving.
- ➔ Use detailed maps or a GPS.
- ➔ Have the car checked and serviced regularly.
- ➔ Keep the gas tank at least a quarter full.
- ➔ Carry an emergency car kit containing a flashlight, extra batteries, and flares.



PERSONAL SAFETY IN HOME CARE

Personal safety starts with being aware of your surroundings, listen to your gut feeling or intuition for a situation that seems or feels unsafe. When you arrive at the client's home, park in a well lit area and in an area away from large trees or shrubs that a person could hide behind. Keep healthcare equipment, supplies, and personal belongings locked out of sight in the trunk of the vehicle. Before getting out of the car, check the surrounding location and activity. If you feel uneasy, do not get out of the car. Discuss with your agency what to do and who to contact if you need to leave the home if you feel like a situation in the home is unsafe. If you are in immediate danger, call 911 emergency services.

During the visit, use basic safety precautions. Be alert. Evaluate each situation for possible violence. Watch for signals of impending violent assault, such as verbally expressed anger and frustration, threatening gestures, signs of drugs or alcohol abuse, or the presence of weapons. If possible, keep an open pathway for exiting. Discuss with your supervisor your agency policies and procedures in handling workplace violence (such as verbal abuse, physical abuse, threatening behaviors) by the client, family, visitors, or others and what to do and what to report for suspected illegal drug dealing or drug manufacturing in the home. Always let your employer know where you are and when to expect you to report back.

Environmental – Slips and trips don't just happen to clients. As a worker, be observant when going in and out of the client's home. Be especially cautious in certain conditions such as during rain, snow and ice. Watch for slippery or uneven surfaces and other structural issues that could cause you to fall and have a potential injury. In the home watch for tripping hazards such as loose rugs, cords, and clutter (on floors, stairs, etc.). On stairs, use railings and take your time. Make sure your vision is not blocked by anything you carry. Always ask clients for permission before moving their belongings. This is especially important for clients with memory or vision disabilities.

Be on the lookout for safety hazards in and around the home. Ask about pets in the home and report to your supervisor allergies you have with pets or if a client's pet feels threatening to you. Report signs of pests such as bed bugs, mice, roaches or other pests that can be a health and safety hazard to you and the client. Report to your supervisor if your client or someone in the home smokes if the client or someone in the home uses oxygen. This is a fire hazard. Medical oxygen can explode if a flame or spark is near. Even if the oxygen is turned off, it can still catch on fire. (U.S. Fire Administration).

Patient handling/transfers- Lifting and moving clients/patients is one of the riskier tasks undertaken by homecare workers and, without the right resources, this task could put both the patient and those attempting to move the client/ patient at risk of injury. Ideas to help reduce risks are:

Talk to your supervisor and determine when the assistance of lifting devices or transfer devices would be needed for client care versus manual transfers and lifting. Determine the client's ability to assist and support their own weight. Ask the client and discuss with your supervisor the findings of the assessment. Do not attempt to lift a client if you do not feel you can do it safely to avoid injury to yourself and the client. Know the limitations of equipment, ask for training before using client equipment to protect you and the client.

Infection control- a home care worker may be exposed to infectious disease in a client's home or be a source of infection to the client. Infection control helps to break the chain of infection. Be sure to know your agency policies and procedures and receive training on infection control including airborne and bloodborne pathogen training, standard precautions, when and how to use personal protective equipment (PPE such as gloves, gowns, masks), how to correctly perform hand hygiene, what is considered an exposure to blood or body fluids and how to report exposures.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health has created a checklist for home care workers' safety. Examples of questions from the checklist include:

Does your initial and annual training include information on:

- preventing musculoskeletal disorders
- reviewing the blood-borne pathogens plan
- knowing what to do if you believe you're in danger or encounter unsanitary conditions
- obtaining ergonomic equipment (for efficient and safe usage)
- reducing stress
- recognizing violent or aggressive behavior
- calming an angry patient
- Do you know how to report your safety concerns?
- Do you have appropriate personal protective equipment, including gloves?
- Do you have a cell phone?
- Are weapons removed from the area of service (for example, bedroom or living room)?
- Is your car serviced regularly?

To access the full checklist, download *NIOSH Hazard Review: Occupational Hazards in Home Healthcare* at <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2010-125/pdfs/2010-125.pdf?id=10.26616/NIOSH PUB2010125>

Be aware of your surroundings:

When you arrive in the patient's neighborhood, ask yourself:

- Do I see any safety hazards?
- What are the road and sidewalk conditions?
- Can I park in a well-lit place with no spaces where someone could hide?
- Are homes well kept?
- Are people loitering on the streets or in yards?
- Do I smell anything unusual (such as odors from the manufacture of illegal drugs) or hear potentially dangerous sounds (such as gunshots or shouting)?



➔ **The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) developed a free mobile app (CDC Homecare Safety) that includes tips for safely handling threatening behavior when providing home care. It can be downloaded at no charge from the Apple App Store or Google Play.**

(Retrieved from American Nurse Journal Volume 15, Number 5, May 2020-Home Care Safety-By Tina M. Marrelli, MSN, MA, RN, FAAN, and Nathalie Rennell, MSN, RN, CNE).