

Home Care Safety

Home care is unique, placing healthcare professionals in client's homes and personal space, and doesn't include typical healthcare organization requirements. For many, home is a sacred and personal space, and most people wouldn't enter someone's home without knowing him or her first. However, home care, including hospice/home health at home and other community-based home visiting models, requires providers to enter the homes of people they don't know personally. Essentially, they're guests in this personal space.

Healthcare organizations with the mission of caring for people in their homes provide a valuable service. Keeping these workers safe who provide this care requires policies and procedures that focus on safety assessment, risk identification, and situation management.

When care is delivered in the home, no healthcare organization dictates visiting hours, sets visitor age requirements, establishes a dress code, or creates other standards. Because home care personnel may be the only providers seeing the clients, they must be comfortable working independently, but also recognize that they're part of a large team of care providers, which includes the clients, other clinicians, and informal caregivers, such as family and friends.

Safety Risks

Home care workers who provide home care face many safety risks because they:

- *Work alone, possibly in high risk-areas.
- *May be exposed to a variety of potentially serious or even life-threatening hazards including overexertion, stress, guns and other weapons, illegal drugs, and verbal abuse and other forms of violence.
- *May be exposed to blood-borne pathogens, communicable disease, needlesticks, temperature extremes, and unhygienic conditions.
- *Sometimes commute long distances from work site to worksite.
- *Are in the personal setting of a person's home, travel in and out of unfamiliar neighborhoods, and interact with older people who may become aggressive/confused because of dementia.
- *May make incorrect assumptions based on their desire to be respectful of the person/family they are visiting.

Workplace Violence

Wherever providers practice, they must recognize the possibility of violence, so those who work in the home also should be aware of the patient's community, know how to avoid violent situations, and be familiar with their organizations policies and procedures related to

avoidance and de-escalation. Studies have shown that 5%-61% of home care workers have experienced some form of workplace violence. In the United States, home care workers are most susceptible to verbal abuse and aggression, threats, and sexual harassment. Nurses, providers, and others can take measures to prevent or migrate violent situations. Safety and violence-avoidance training should not be a one-time event; it requires practice, ongoing education and awareness.

Worker Responsibilities

Most home care workers practice alone, they have a responsibility for their own safety and to avoid violence, when possible. Our policies and procedures include training on personal safety, the Red File Protocol, education on blood-borne pathogens, and conducting home visits. These practices have been put in place to ensure staff safety. The home care worker will incorporate these things into their daily routines.

Pre-Visit Strategies

Create a professional presence, which should be reflected in your clothing, and demonstrate a caring and concerned attitude toward your work.

- *Be respectful and watch for clues about household normal.

- *This begins when you call to let your client/patient know that you are on way for a visit.

- *Ask your client/patient for directions if needed, where you should park, where to enter the home, who will greet you, if they have any family/guests there, and if any pets are in the home.

- *If your client/patient lives in an area that has poor cell service, let your Supervisors know where you will be, and you will be done with your visit.

- *Keep your personal belongings/supplies locked in the trunk of your vehicle and remove only what's needed at each visit.

Visit Strategies

During your home visit, explain everything you're doing and ask before touching anyone. If it is a tense situation or one that's getting more tense, know that asking too many questions can be overwhelming and clients/patients/families can become irritated. Ask questions that are specific to the task that you are doing. If a client/patient/ or family member's behavior begins to escalate, remain calm and caring to diffuse anger. Don't match any threats or try to give orders. During your visit use basic safety precautions-be alert to your surroundings, know where your

client/patient/their guests are while your there during your visit, try not to keep your back turned away for too long, and be sure to use active listening. Examples of Potential Violence include shouting, verbal abuse, threatening gestures, weapons, or signs of drug or alcohol misuse. Make sure to maintain professional boundaries and recognize your own limits and abilities.

Be Prepared

The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health has created a checklist for home care workers' safety.

- *Know what to do if you believe you're in danger or encounter unsanitary conditions.
- *Reduce stress.
- *Recognize violent or aggressive behavior.
- *Try calming an upset/agitated client/patient.
- *Do you know how to report your safety concerns?
- *Is your car serviced regularly?

Be Aware of Your Surroundings

When you arrive in the client's/patient neighborhood as yourself some questions. 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 people loitering on the streets or in the yards? Do you smell anything unusual such as odors from the manufacture of illegal drugs or hear potentially dangerous sounds such as gunshots or shouting? The Center for Disease Control of Prevention (CDC) has developed a free mobile app-CDC Homecare Safety. This app includes safety tips for handling threatening behavior when providing home care. It can be downloaded at no charge from your Apple App Store or Google Play.

Employer Responsibilities

OSHA recommends that employers annually assess and control risks of workplace violence to ensure worker protection. Annually at our fall in-service we educate our staff on safety on the job, the safe use of chemicals in the workplace, oxygen safety, communicable diseases, standard precautions, fire safety, and infection control. Let's review our Red File Protocol!

If you feel in danger and can't safely leave the home, follow this protocol:

1. Phone the main number in Kennett 800-286-5892 Ext. 1101

2. Say something about a “Red File.”
3. Identify yourself and your location.
4. Clearly answer the questions asked of you.

KNOW HOW TO RECEIVE IMMEDIATE HELP!!

Client and Family Responsibilities

Clients and their families also have a role in creating safe environments for home care personal. They are given information per the agency on rights and responsibilities, which may include:

- *Worker safety information and agency policies.
- *Informing home care workers of potential hazards.
- *Restraining pets who are aggressive during visits.
- *Removing tripping hazards in the home or be willing to remove during visits.
- *Limiting potentially violent family member’s access during visits.
- *Refraining from being verbally abuse or inappropriately touching staff.

Safety Is a Team Effort

Adhering to best practices can help minimize risks and keep home care personal safe. Remember to report to your supervisors when there are safety issues. Your presence in the home is needed for our clients/patients and we want to make sure that we take your safety concerns seriously. Together we can make a safer work environment for all our employees’!!

