

# Partners in Quality Care

- June 2016 -

*In-Home Aides Partners in Quality Care* is a monthly newsletter published for member agencies.

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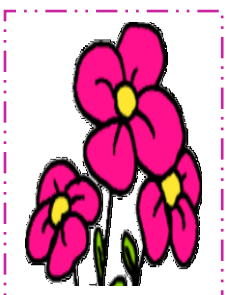
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Association for  
**Home & Hospice Care**  
of North Carolina



## PERSONAL SAFETY FOR THE HOME CARE AIDE

Serving patients in the community is the essence of home healthcare; however, home care workers have little control over their work environment which may contain a number of safety and health hazards. This newsletter will cover tips on personal safety. As a home care employee, it is important to know your agency's policies and procedures related to your personal safety and discuss the 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.

### Tips for Making Visits Safely:

- **Check directions to destination before starting the trip (be sure of the location and have accurate directions)**
- **If using a GPS enter address before starting to drive**
- **Confirm visit with your client before going**
- **Before making first visit find out if pets or animals are present.**
- **Lock car doors**
- **Keep healthcare equipment, supplies, and personal belongings locked out of sight in the trunk of the vehicle**
- **Notify your employer if you observe an unsecured weapon in the patient's home**
- **Be cautious of wearing expensive/excessive jewelry**
- **If you notice strong chemical odors or suspect that there's a drug lab in the area, notify the local police and your employer**
- ➔ ***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.***
- ➔ ***Maintain behavior that helps to diffuse anger:***
  - ***Present a calm, caring attitude. Do not match threats. Do not give orders. Acknowledge the person's feelings.***
- ➔ ***Avoid behaviors that may be interpreted as aggressive (for example, moving rapidly or getting too close, touching unnecessarily, or speaking loudly).***
- ➔ ***If possible, keep an open pathway for exiting.***
- ➔ ***Trust your own judgment; avoid situations that don't feel right.***
- ➔ ***If you cannot gain control of the situation, take these steps:***
  - ***Shorten the visit. Remove yourself from the situation.***
- ➔ ***If you feel threatened, leave immediately.***
- ➔ ***Use your cell phone to call your employer or 911 for help (depending on the severity of the situation).***
- ➔ ***Report any incident of violence to your employer.***
- ➔ ***If you are being verbally abused, ask the abuser to stop the conversation. If the abuser does not stop the conversation, leave the premises and notify your employer.***
- ➔ ***Trust your instincts and your gut feelings if you feel like a situation is unsafe.***

Safety in the home is multi-faceted. It includes fire safety, chemical hazards, the potential for natural disasters, animals, exposure to blood borne pathogens, infection control, unsanitary working conditions, unsafe structural problems in the home, sexual harassment, ethnic and religious harassment, violence, possible drug activity and back safety. A few safety-highlights follow:

### Starting at the beginning - Traveling to the client's home:

- Do not deviate from your schedule. Your employer should know what clients you are seeing for the day. Before entering your car, check the back seat. When approaching your car, be sure to look under the car. Always let your employer know where you are and when to expect you to report back.
- Know where you are going. Keep a map with you in case you get lost. Observe windows, alleys and doorways for loiterers.
- Keep the doors locked when driving and keep the windows up.
- If you have access to a cellular phone, carry it with you.
- Do not use cell phones or text while driving.
- Before getting out of the car, check the surrounding location and activity. If you feel uneasy, do not get out of the car.

### Preparing for Natural Disasters:

- Learn the number for your local American Red Cross chapter- <http://www.redcross.org/find-your-local-chapter>.
- Learn which disasters could happen in your geographical area.
- Learn how to prepare for those disasters.
- **Talk with your supervisor about the emergency plans for your agency.**
- Talk with your client about possible disasters.
- Ask your supervisor about the disaster plan for your client
- Make sure your client knows who and when to call for help. Post emergency numbers where they can easily locate them.
- Help your client prepare a disaster supply kit. **Your supervisor can help you with a complete list of the items for your area that your client may need.**

### Highway Safety Tips:

- Familiarize yourself with your state laws- you can go to this website to check state laws on distracted driving-<http://www.distraction.gov/stats-research-laws/state-laws.html>
- Pay attention to the road signs
- Get off the road safely to use the cell phone or try to read directions
- Obey the speed limit signs
- Drive carefully in rain – road may be slippery
- Do not drive on flooded roadways
- Be aware of other drivers
- Know where you are at all times, in case of emergency
- Use seatbelts
- Avoid distracting activities such as eating, drinking, and adjusting radio and other controls while driving- see page 3 for more on distracted driving such as texting
- Avoid driving when over-tired
- Use detailed maps to determine your route before you leave, or use a GPS
- Have the vehicle checked and serviced regularly
- Keep the gas tank at least a quarter to a half full
- Carry an emergency kit containing a flashlight, extra batteries, flares, a blanket, and bottled water
- Have your keys out and ready when going to your car



Report to your supervisor if your client smokes and wears oxygen. This is a fire hazard.

### Chemical Hazards:

- In-home aides can come in contact with hazardous chemicals in clients' homes.
- These chemicals, such as cleaning products, may seem common, but can cause serious effects.
- You need to be aware of the chemicals that you are working with. Ask your supervisor about the agency's MSDS book. An MSDS is a Material Safety Data Sheet that contains information about the safe use of chemicals.
- Never mix chemicals - Never leave chemicals unattended - **Never work with chemicals that are not labeled.**
- Never work with chemicals in a closed area. You need plenty of ventilation when working with chemicals.
- Never pour undiluted bleach on urine. It mixes with the ammonia and creates toxic fumes.
- Report any problems that you experience to your supervisor.

### Other Safety Issues to Think About:

- ❖ **Sexual Harassment** - Clients and their family members often cross the employee/client boundary when care is being provided. You should report to your supervisor if you are being spoken to inappropriately or touched in a sexual manner. Remember to keep a proper client/employee relationship.
- ❖ **Back safety** – Remember, if your instincts tell you that a client is too heavy for you, then do not attempt the transfer, but call the office for assistance. Lift with your legs and not with your back. Bend at the knees and not at the waist. Use a lift whenever possible and be sure to have proper training. Work to make sure that transfers are as smooth as possible. Remember that you are at risk for a back injury – only you can prevent injuries from happening. **Think smart.....Work Smart!!!!!!!!!!**
- ❖ **Possible drug activity** - Frequent activity in and out of a home may be an indicator of drug activity. Be mindful not to accuse but to simply report the facts to your supervisor.
- ❖ **Infection control** - Follow your agency's infection control plan. Use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), including gloves and respiratory protection when necessary. Agencies are responsible for providing these types of supplies. Participate in your employer's bloodborne pathogens program and follow your agency's policies for post exposure follow-up if exposed to the blood of a patient.

- ✓ Did you know- The OSHA bloodborne pathogens standard [29 CFR\*1910.1030] is the Federal standard that protects workers against occupational exposures to bloodborne diseases. These requirements set rules for the employer responsibility to the worker (such as providing gloves for workers).

Resources: DHHS CDC National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)- Occupational Hazards in Home Healthcare, 2010; About Patient Safety in the Home- National Hospice Organization; What Staff need to know about personal safety- Michelle White- 2006; Home Care Compass modules- AHHC- 2006; AHHC Hospice Aide Teleconference- Safety; Staying Safe in the working world; September 2013; AHHC Aide teleconference- The Aide's Role in Safety in the Home, June 2014; OSHA article home health care- [https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/home\\_healthcare/](https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/home_healthcare/)

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, [Distraction.gov](http://Distraction.gov); NIOSH homehealthcare workers- how to prevent driving related injuries.

#### **What is distracted driving?**

- Distraction occurs any time you take your eyes off the road, your hands off the wheel, and your mind off your primary task: driving safely. Any non-driving activity you engage in is a potential distraction and increases your risk of crashing.
- Texting is the most alarming distraction because it involves manual, visual, and cognitive distraction simultaneously. Sending or reading a text takes your eyes off the road for 5 seconds. At 55 mph, that's like driving the length of an entire football field, blindfolded. It's extraordinarily dangerous.

**Remember that personal safety in the home incorporates many areas.  
Think before each and every activity.**

## **In-Home Aide newsletter - June 2016**

### **POST-TEST Personal Safety**

**For each question circle true or false**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

1. Home Care workers have little control over their work environment and personal safety awareness is an important component of working in home care.  
  
True                      False
2. Trusting your own judgment and instincts are important components of maintaining your personal safety.  
  
True                      False
3. It is okay to talk or text on the phone while driving if you are trying to get information such as where your client lives.  
  
True                      False
4. Working with chemicals such as cleaning products in a client's home are routine and do not pose any safety risk.  
  
True                      False
5. Always let your employer know where you are and when to expect you to report back.  
  
True                      False
6. It is sometimes okay for a client to smoke while they are using their oxygen.  
  
True                      False
7. A back safety tip is to lift with your legs and not with your back.  
  
True                      False
8. It is not your responsibility to report unsanitary conditions to your supervisor.  
  
True                      False
9. Be sure to follow your agency's infection control plan as part of your safety plan.  
  
True                      False
10. Part of your personal safety plan is to talk with your supervisor about preparing for natural disasters.  
  
True                      False