What is Home Care?

"Home care" is a simple phrase that encompasses a wide range of health and social services. These services are delivered at home to recovering, disabled, chronically or terminally ill persons in need of medical, nursing, social, or therapeutic treatment and/or assistance with the essential activities of daily living.

Generally, home care is appropriate whenever a person prefers to stay at home but needs ongoing care that cannot easily or effectively be provided solely by family and friends. More and more older people, electing to live independent, non-institutionalized lives, are receiving home care services as their physical capabilities diminish. Younger adults who are disabled or recuperating from acute illness are choosing home care whenever possible. Chronically ill infants and children are receiving sophisticated medical treatment in their loving and secure home environments.

The term home health agency often indicates that a home care provider is Medicare certified. A Medicare-certified agency has met federal minimum requirements for patient care and management and therefore can provide Medicare and Medicaid home health services. Individuals requiring skilled home care services usually receive their care from a home health agency. Due to regulatory requirements, services provided by these agencies are highly supervised and controlled.

What Types of Services Do Home Care Providers Deliver?

Home care providers deliver a wide variety of health care and supportive services, ranging from professional nursing and home care aides to physical, occupational, respiratory, and speech therapies. They also may provide social work and nutritional care. St. Luke Home Health employs the following health care providers:

Registered nurses (RNs) provide skilled services that cannot be performed safely and effectively by nonprofessional personnel. Some of these services include injections and intravenous therapy, wound care, education on disease treatment and prevention, and patient

assessments.

Physical therapists (PTs) work to restore the mobility and strength of patients who are limited or disabled by physical injuries through the use of exercise, massage, and other methods. PTs often alleviate pain and restore injured muscles with specialized equipment. They also teach patients and caregivers special techniques for walking and transfer.

Social workers evaluate the social and emotional factors affecting ill and disabled individuals and provide counseling. They also help patients and their family members identify available community resources. Social workers often serve as case managers when patients' conditions are so complex that professionals need to assess medical and supportive needs and coordinate a variety of services.

Speech language pathologists work to develop and restore the speech of individuals with communication disorders; usually these disorders are the result of traumas such as surgery or stroke. Speech therapists also help retrain patients in breathing, swallowing, and muscle control.

Occupational therapists (OTs) help individuals who have physical, developmental, social, or emotional problems that prevent them from performing the general activities of daily living (ADLs). OTs instruct patients on using specialized rehabilitation techniques and equipment to improve their function in tasks such as eating, bathing, dressing, and basic household routines.

Home health aides assist patients with ADLs such as getting in and out of bed, walking, bathing, toileting, and dressing.

Dieticians are available to consult with professional staff regarding dietary needs and interventions.

Who Pays for Home Care Services?

Home care services can be paid for directly by the patient and his or her family members or through a variety of public and private sources. Public third-party payors include Medicare, Medicaid, the Older Americans Act, the Veterans Administration, and Social Services block grant programs. Private third-party payors include commercial health insurance companies, managed care organizations, CHAMPUS, and workers' compensation.