Journal of Life Care Planning, Vol. 8, No. 4, (195-198)

Tools for Making Home Care Decisions: A Clinician's Worksheets

Karen Preston PHN, MS, CRRN, FIALCP

Editor's Note: This article introduces one of the topics to be discussed at the upcoming Life Care Planning Summit 2010, held in Atlanta, Georgia on April 17-18, 2010. Make plans to attend and contribute to the consensus-building activities that are a traditional part of the Summit meetings held by and for life care planners. Summit announcement and registration details published elsewhere in this issue.

Abstract

Home care decisions can be a difficult area for many life care planners. Making objective and appropriate recommendations for obtaining care from an agency versus privately hiring is sometimes challenging and is an area that is open to receiving attention in testimony situations. In an attempt to make the decision-making process more objective, the author of this article has developed two tools. This article describes the two tools, offering life care planners the opportunity to incorporate them into practice.

Designing Useful Decision-Making Tools

Many life care plans include caregiver assistance in the home setting. For the more catastrophic cases, this is often the most expensive item in the life care plan, which contributes to it potentially being a very contentious topic. Arguments are offered about why caregivers should be either privately hired or obtained through an agency. In an attempt to bring some objectivity to the decision-making process, the tools in this article have been used by the author's company for several years with successful results in justifying home care recommendations.

The first tool (Table 1) is a series of questions designed to evaluate the cognitive skills and resources necessary for privately hiring caregivers. Complexity of care and availability of funding and community agencies are also covered. The tool does not provide a "correct" answer, but endeavors to make sure that the life care planner has considered relevant criteria for making the decision. The life care planner can complete this alone or may consult with other experts, such as neuropsychologist, therapists, and physicians, to determine the most accurate responses. The tool has not been formally tested for validity or reliability.

Table 1: Decision-Making Criteria for Obtaining Home Caregiver Services: Private Hire versus Agency

Client Name: **Date:**

Client/Guardian/Conservator:	**Yes**	**No**	**Comment**
Is capable of hiring			
Is capable of training			
Is capable of supervising			
Is capable of disciplining/firing			
Is capable of following applicable employer laws			
Can provide direction to caregiver during course of work			
Can make an appropriate back-up plan for unplanned caregiver absences			
Can hire enough caregivers to cover all shifts and planned absences			
Is capable of collecting and providing data for payroll and taxes			
Has or can obtain workers' compensation or household employee coverage for injury			
Has or can obtain applicable services to assist with employer responsibilities:			
- Payroll and tax service			
- Human resource services			
- Attorney services			
- Visiting nurse or other professional to assist with training/supervision			
- Case manager			
Has skilled care need(s) that requires complex tasks or presents risk if done incorrectly/omitted			

Resources

Funding is available for private hire		
Funding is available for agency		
Agencies are available that service the geographic area		
Agencies are available that service the age of client and needs of client		
Agencies are available that provide needed skill level and hours		

Based on above answers:

Private hire is feasible and appropriate		
Agency hire is feasible and appropriate		

The second tool (Table 2) is a spreadsheet formatted to calculate all costs associated with obtaining home care services. The private-hire section includes all the additional costs that must be added to the basic hourly wage to accurately calculate the total costs. An agency-hire section also is included and provides an easy comparison with private-hire costs. The spreadsheet is formatted so that the life care planner enters in the variable information in the shaded cells, such as hourly wage, number of hours per day, and number of days per year. The spreadsheet automatically calculates the annual wage. The life care planner should adjust the default values, such as the state-specific taxes, to reflect applicable values. The life care planner also enters data about periodic costs, such as advertising, screening, and case management supervision. This will provide the complete annual costs. The costs are shown to the third decimal so that less rounding occurs and makes it easier to determine how the calculated costs are achieved; a method that may be useful when an economist evaluates the life care plan.

Summary

Life care planners can benefit from using tools that facilitate objective thinking and aid in providing consistency in the planning process. Life care planners are encouraged to consider appropriate and objective tools. Creating a dialog about specific tools is helpful, and all life care planners are invited to use these two tools. The author welcomes feedback on accuracy and refinements that will improve the tools. Comments can be sent to **RNSPreston@aol.com**.

About the Author

Karen Preston, PHN, MS, CRRN, FIALCP, is co-owner of RNS HealthCare Consultants, specializing in case management and life care planning. She is Past-President of the Association of Rehabilitation Nurses and Past-Chair of the International Academy of Life Care Planners, a section of IARP.

Editor's Note: The tools presented in this article have not been peer-reviewed or evaluated for reliability and validity.

Table 2: Calculation and Comparison of Attendant Costs: Private Hire versus Agency Hire

	Year to Start				0		0		0
Calculation of Private Hire Attendant Costs					Hourly		Hourly		Live-in
Line Item	**Units/Quantity**			-		-		-	
Hourly pay					$0.000		$0.000		$0.000
FICA		7.65%							
Medicare		1.45%							
State Employment Training Tax		0.10%							
State Unemployment Insurance (UI)		3.40%							
Total % added		12.60%			$0.000		$0.000		$0.000
Sub-total hourly pay					$0.000		$0.000		$0.000
Hours per day x hourly pay				0	$0.000	0	$0.000	12	$0.000
Days per year x daily pay				0	$0.000	0	$0.000	0	$0.000
		Cost	Units per year						
Work comp coverage (homeowner's)	Allowance per year	$0.000	1		$0.000		$0.000		$0.000
Hiring & screening allowance *	Cost per occurrence	$0.000	0		$0.000		$0.000		$0.000
Payroll service	Monthly fee x 12 months	$0.000	12		$0.000		$0.000		$0.000
Case management hours	Hourly rate x annual hours	$0.000	0		$0.000		$0.000		$0.000
Agency back-up for absences	Daily rate x days per year	$0.000	0		$0.000		$0.000		$0.000
Live-in room allowance	Utilities: daily allowance	$0.000	365.25						$0.000
Live-in board allowance	Daily food allowance	$0.000	365.25						$0.000
Additional UI for room value **	3.4%x $32.45 x 52 weeks	$57.372	1						$57.372
Additional UI for board value **	3.4%x $9.15 x 365.25 days	$113.629	1						$113.629
Total additional cost					$0.000		$0.000		$171.001
Total attendant cost/year					**$0.000**		**$0.000**		**$171.001**

* Includes ads, drug screens, background check, and other miscellaneous costs

** Based on State of California values of room and board; update these values annually

NOTE: Live-in pay is typically equivalent to approximately 12 hours of pay; therefore pay is calculated using 12 hours

Calculation of Agency Procured Attendant Costs		Hourly		Hourly		Live-in
Hourly or daily pay		$0.000		$0.000		$0.000
Hours per day x hourly pay	0	$0.000	0	$0.000	Live-in	
Days per year x daily pay	0	$0.000	0	$0.000	0	$0.000
Total attendant cost/year		**$0.000**		**$0.000**		**$0.000**