

Article 1: How Do I Find a Good Local Home Care/Domiciliary Company?

When I tell people what I do one of the most common questions I get asked is 'how do I find good care?' More and more people need some element of social care to help them or someone close to them with varying difficulties at different stages in their lives; difficulties that often impair daily living.

Trying to determine who are good providers and who are not can be quite bewildering, so this article is about helping people wade through a multitude of resources to help get to the information they may need. It's not a 'prescription' to 'do this, then do that', but about giving people some guidance and ideas to make their own choices.

There are only a few organisations available that can provide free assistance in finding a care company to provide the required level of care, on whose regulatory powers and/or procedures you can rely should things go wrong. You should also be able to rely on their inspection regimes to ensure that a care company has the correct insurance, staff training, care competencies, and appropriate policies and procedures, among many other things. Be aware that there are many organisations that do not have any regulatory powers and may charge you fees for finding a company, and therefore may be biased.

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) should be your first stop. It is the industry regulator, is independent and inspects all registered care services, which includes hospitals, GPs, dentists, care homes and domiciliary care providers. They have an excellent document titled 'What you can expect from a good home care agency', which is available on their website for you to read, download and print.

Home care is also referred to as 'domiciliary care'. All domiciliary care providers who provide a 'Regulated Activity' in England must be registered with the CQC; otherwise they are committing an offence. The CQC monitor, inspect and regulate services to make sure that they meet fundamental standards of quality and safety and publish

what they find, including performance ratings, to help people choose care. Prior to an inspection, they also survey some of the service users receiving care. The survey results form part of the inspection, which takes between one and two days, but could be longer.

On the CQC's website you can look for services within a given radius of your location, or you can search for any specific organisation that you want to find out more about. But bear in mind that to find them you may have to search for their trading name and/or company name. The results of an inspection, 'Inspection Reports', are made public and are available on their website for you to view or download. The CQC make them easy to read and available in different formats on their website. Most organisations will be happy to send you a copy of their latest CQC report if asked.

Take the time to read the report and raise any queries. It is always a good idea to speak to the CQC so that they can:

- direct you to the information that you are looking for;
- help you understand the content of inspection reports and registration details;
and
- help access their latest materials.

The CQC website displays a care company's current rating, which domiciliary care providers must display on their website and prominently at their offices. These ratings cover five key areas relating to the company. Is it:

- Safe
- Effective
- Caring
- Responsive
- Well Led

There are four possible grades for each key area:

- Outstanding
- Good
- Requires Improvement
- Inadequate

An organisation can promote itself as 'Outstanding' if it has been awarded outstanding in at least one of those five key areas. Be aware that even if they are outstanding in one of the five areas it does not necessarily mean that they are outstanding in the other four. The information about an organisation is clear on the CQC website and on the individual inspection reports.

You can do additional internet and social media searches for 'domiciliary care' in your area. But you should be cautious because some organisations or individuals may purport to be registered and/or compliant with regulations or standards when they may not be. So, if you find a care company, check them out on the CQC website.

Do your homework and consider why a person needs care. What is it that is causing a problem, what outcomes do you want to achieve and what budget can you work with. Locally, an hour of care costs around £13 and generally gets more expensive the further south in Britain you go. Price is not necessarily an indicator of quality. Consult with other family members perhaps. People come to need care either via a planned or crisis event so factor in how quickly you will need the care. The provider you elect will need to be flexible, for example, should there be a delay in hospital discharge of the person requiring the care (the client or service user).

Ask among families, friends, work colleagues and people you know to see if they can recommend an organisation, and ask what their experiences were. Did the carers do what was needed? Were they flexible enough? Did they arrive on time? Did the organisation itself support the care/carers and complete all the checks needed

before care commenced? Were they given enough information about what can and cannot be done? Word of mouth is a great resource but do bear in mind that no one resource will tell you everything you may need to know.

Look at providers' websites and social media posts and ask questions about what it is you need but also to find out more about the organisation. Do they have the skills, experience and qualifications/training to deal with your needs? This is quite an important question if you are looking for a provider that can provide care for those with dementia, for example, or those who are approaching the end of their lives. Just because the provider is registered with the CQC does not necessarily mean that they can provide care in all scenarios, so check. What is their supervision like? How can they provide consistent carers? Can they be contacted outside office hours? Are they registered with the CQC, and have they been inspected by them? What were the results? What do their service user surveys tell you? Can they work with other health professionals and be part of an effective care team?

There are other sources and websites, some sponsored, that promote care providers on the internet. While they may have some value in your search, no one site should be considered the absolute authority or last word. That said, it would be unwise not to consult the CQC. They are there to help, as are the United Kingdom Home Care Association (UKHCA), who have an excellent free publication available to download from their website called 'Choosing Care at Home'.

You can also refer to your local authority for support in finding a care provider and can make a referral to them directly for care and support. Many people do not realise that many charities like Dementia UK, Parkinson's, the Stroke Association and the MS Society may be able to help, especially if part of the reason for care relates to a specific condition like Parkinson's. Often, these national organisations have regional or local groups that possess an abundance of information and expertise about specific care needs and other issues like claiming benefits and arranging holidays. Some of these organisations even have specialist nursing and care teams that you

may be able to access. You can find these organisations via a simple internet search.

Many local authorities have several care companies with whom they commission care; often on a rotational basis. However, if you want to have a named company, for example, because they have the specific expertise and experience you need, you can make your preferences known. The local authority should consider and accommodate your choice of care company.

Once you have done your research and compiled a short list of domiciliary providers, if you feel ready, you must ascertain more pertinent information. For this kind of important decision, a telephone conversation or meeting with the provider will tell you so much more than glossy brochures or promotional materials will. Discussions should be around answering your queries and concerns, understanding what your needs are, explaining what can and what cannot be done and describing how things work; helping you understand what choices you have because there are some limitations you will need to be aware of. They should also tell you about the mandatory assessments that have to be completed by the care company before the commencement of a package of care.

At the end of the conversation you should have gained a greater understanding of how domiciliary care is delivered and supported by the care company, whether they are able to meet your given needs and choices and if they can adapt to any potential future change in your circumstances. This should enable you to make an informed decision relating to which care company to select, but do take some time to reflect on the information you have gained; perhaps consult with friends and family. You can always go back to the company to seek clarification or more information on any aspect.

Andrew Key
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For further advice and guidance please contact the following organisations:

Care Quality Commission	www.cqc.org.uk	Tel: 03000 616161
UKHCA	www.ukhca.co.uk	Tel: 020 8661 8188

Biography

Andrew Key has more than 25 years' experience in the health and social care sector and is Managing Director of Choice Care, a Blackburn-based domiciliary care provider. An active participant with differing local and national groups, he has managed to improve local commissioned care through: innovation in the administration of medication in the community; care sector training; the implementation of end-of-life standards culminating in receiving the Six Steps End of Life Accreditation from East Lancashire Hospice; and the development of a Night Care and an Integrated Triage and Response Care Team in Blackburn. In 2018, he was a finalist at the national Great British Care Awards for the category 'Outstanding Contribution to Social Care'.

Choice Care provides a wide range of domiciliary care to people of all ages in their own homes by highly trained and skilled, compassionate home care teams. They are accredited trainers for Parkinson's, Alzheimer's UK, the Stroke Association and others and have excellent working relationships with local care sector organisations. They are an active member of the UKHCA, are registered with the CQC and are commissioned by Blackburn with Darwen, Lancashire and Bury Councils, the area's Clinical Commissioning Group, insurance companies and private individuals. In August 2016, after nearly two years' work, they blazed a trail in social care to achieve the Six Steps End of Life Accreditation from East Lancashire Hospice. In 2017, one of their care professionals won the category of 'Homecare Carer of the Year' at the national Great British Care Awards.