

## **AGING HAPPENS: Two considerations for in-home caregivers**

*By Ellen Waldman*

*March 9, 2015*

Over the years, families have asked me if they need to actually employ the private caregivers who are working in their home. If they are truly employees, this would require that the family or client set themselves up as a household employer. Part of that requirement includes creating payroll, enrolling in Worker's Compensation, and having appropriate tax documents filled out. These are generally items best suited to and might require the services of a bookkeeper, or maybe a tax preparer. Obviously then, this is not a simple question to answer, but it seems to pop up with some regularity. I am not an attorney, a bookkeeper or a CPA, so I always defer to those professionals on questions like this one.

Recently, I attended a Webinar on this topic called, "In Home Caregivers: The Advantages of Hiring Legally and the Consequences of Hiring Under the Table." Sounds ominous, and it actually can be if you aren't sure what you're doing. According to this presentation, there are all sorts of consequences of hiring illegally.

Some have to do with federal or state tax fraud laws, for instance. It turns out that if you were in the wrong, you could end up facing expensive penalties. What if the caregiver at the end of their service with you tried to receive unemployment benefits? There could well be a problem at that point.

The presenter, who is an attorney, went on to explain all the benefits of hiring legally, meaning the caregiver is your actual employee. The benefits for both you and the employee are numerous. Besides doing it correctly from a legal standpoint, everyone is well-protected from any charges down the line. Clearly, his advice was that in almost every situation that arises, the person who is your caregiver in the home is your employee. If you are concerned about the possible implications of this and its complexities, get some professional advice.

Please note that I'm only referring to those individuals who do not work through a licensed caregiving agency. Their employer covers all these obligations. This information affects only those who work as caregivers independently and are not provided by an agency.

Besides this vital question of legality when hiring someone as a caregiver, the next important requirement is being well-trained. Just because someone took care of their mother or friend, does not mean that under a different set of conditions, they would know what to do. Common sense does not always pan out when working with people who have dementia, for instance. There is a whole different skill set that comes into play here, and it's not one that is naturally developed. It takes training and education.

If you're faced with this caregiving task, my best recommendation is to get some training for yourself. Also, make sure that anyone who comes to work for you has had a least six months of verifiable experience successfully caregiving for someone who has dementia. Your family is not the training ground where you want them to begin learning these skills.

Beginning this month, a series of courses for caregivers is being offered for free in Medford. This series is funded by the Oregon legislature, which recognizes and supports the importance of training for caregivers. These trainings are designed for family members helping coordinate or provide care at home for a loved one. It's also designed for paid and unpaid caregivers, health care and public safety workers, and social workers.

Visit the website Oregon Care Partners at [www.OregonCarePartners.com](http://www.OregonCarePartners.com), or call 1-800-930-6851 in Portland, to register. I encourage families facing this need, and those who wish to work with this group of individuals, to get as much actual training as possible.

Here's a look at the local offerings. There is a huge offering of online courses on their website as well:

- Living with Early Stage Alzheimer's — For Caregivers. 3 to 4:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 11 and March 18. First United Methodist Church, 607 West Main St., Medford.
- Challenging Behaviors: Effective Approaches to Common Behaviors in the Non-dementia Adult Population. 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Thursday, March 19. Medford Library, 205 South Central Avenue, Medford.

Before bringing caregiving help into your home, consider these two areas of employment and training. Everyone will benefit when you make the best informed decisions possible.