

# USING AN AGENCY

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## 1 Who should read 'Using an Agency'?

This booklet is for people who want to use Personal Assistants from a Home Care or Domiciliary Care Agency for their personal care, domestic support and social needs. It would also be useful to someone who is organising assistance for a disabled friend or relative.

Using a Question and Answer format, it helps to give you an understanding of issues that might arise if you choose to use a Personal Assistant from an independent commercial Care Agency or one run by a voluntary organisation.

After reading this leaflet, if there is anything you are unclear about, please contact the Direct Payments Support Service. Our contact details are set out at the end of this leaflet.

We have an up to date list of approved local agencies, with contact names and their current rates.

## 2 What is a Home Care Agency?

A Home Care Agency is an organisation that can provide you with a Personal Assistant who can carry out a range of personal assistance / support tasks (including nursing care) in your own home. They charge a fee for providing the service.

Agencies sometimes specialise in different types of work but they will usually try to provide any service that you require. However, you should discuss your particular needs with someone at the agency before deciding whether or not that agency would be the best one to suit your requirements.

### **3 Why would I want to use an Agency?**

If you use an agency for all your services, you will still have choice and control over how your personal assistance needs are met but you will be relieved of all the administration related to employment, tax and National Insurance.

### **4 Are there alternatives to using an Agency?**

There are a number of other ways you can arrange Personal Assistance.

The Direct Payments Support Service can provide you with information about alternative sources for Personal Assistance other than agencies.

You can request an information pack containing Factsheets which cover every aspect of employing Personal Assistants by contacting the Direct Payments Support Service.

### **5 What will the Agency tell the Personal Assistant about me?**

An agency would probably consider it good practice to give a Personal Assistant some details about your condition, situation and assistance needs.

If there is anything that you do not want Personal Assistants to know, perhaps until you get to know them better, tell the agency in advance. They should always respect your right to privacy.

The United Kingdom Home Care Association (see **Useful Addresses** section) code of practice states that a member agency should not talk about you to anyone else without your permission.

You should also be able to see a copy of any information that the agency keeps about you.

## **6 I do not like filling in forms. How much paperwork is involved?**

You would be asked to read and sign your contract. You would also be asked to sign a timesheet, either on a daily or weekly basis, confirming how many hours a Personal Assistant has spent with you.

You would be invoiced every month and asked to settle the bill either by cheque or by setting up a direct debit. Everything else could be dealt with by the agency.

## **7 Money to pay an Agency**

You would be able to use the Direct Payments you receive from Social Services to pay the agency fees and any other related costs. You could also use the money from the Independent Living Fund if you are entitled to it. To find out if you are eligible for an ILF Award, you can request an information leaflet. You will find their contact details in the **Useful Addresses** section.

Prices agencies charge do vary, so you should contact at least two agencies in order to get a general idea of average costs. The charge could be less if you have a regular arrangement with the agency and if you require a higher number of hours.

As with many things, price is not necessarily a guide to the quality of services.

Do make sure that the price you are quoted is the price you will pay. The agency may add VAT, travel expenses and commission to the bill.

Agencies may charge a different rate at weekends and bank holidays. Ask in advance for a full list of charges.

## **8 What am I paying for?**

The amount you pay will include the Personal Assistant's wages, National Insurance, VAT (on all or part of the hourly rate, depending on the type of agency) and a contribution towards their running costs. The agency may also use part of the money to provide basic training and insurance cover for their Personal Assistants.

All these charges are usually included in the standard hourly rate that you pay.

## **9 When do I pay the Agency?**

If you only hire Personal Assistants occasionally, you would usually be sent a bill after each visit. If you set up a regular weekly package then you could arrange to pay either weekly or monthly.