

Caregiver Glossary

Throughout your caregiving experience, you may hear new words and unfamiliar terms. Below are some of the words you may encounter and their meanings.

- A -

Activities of Daily Living (ADLs): Activities that include help in walking, getting in and out of bed, bathing, dressing, eating, toileting and self-administration of medications. Widely used as a basis for assessing functional status.

Acute Care: Medical care designed to treat or cure disease or injury, usually within a limited time period. Acute care usually refers to physician and/or hospital services of less than three months' duration.

Administration on Aging (AOA): An agency of the US Department of Health and Human Services that is the focal point for older persons and their concerns at the federal level.

Adult Day Care: The recreational and rehabilitation services provided for persons who require daytime supervision. An alternative between care in the home and care in an institution.

Advance Directive: A general term that describes two kinds of legal documents, living wills and medical powers of attorney. These documents allow a person to give instructions about future medical care should he or she be unable to participate in medical decisions due to serious illness or incapacity. **Advocacy:** Speaking or writing to support or defend an interest or cause. In the caregiving role, one may advocate for their loved one's wishes, dignity, and comfort.

Alzheimer's Disease: A progressive, irreversible form of dementia. It is the most common form of dementia, affecting 5% of those over 65 and 20% of those over 80. The cause of the disease is unknown at this time. Symptoms begin with loss of memory and rational thinking and usually progress to total disability over a number of years.

Ambulatory: Able to walk about.

Ambulatory with Assistance: Able to get about with the aid of a cane, crutch, brace, wheelchair or walker.

Area Agency on Aging (AAA): Local government agencies that grant or contract with public and private organizations to provide services for older persons within their area.

Assisted Living (ALF): A special combination of housing, personal services and health care designed to respond to the individual needs of those who require help with Activities of Daily Living. Care is provided in a professionally managed group living environment and usually includes private occupancy units, three meals a day, 24-hour staff availability to meet the individual's scheduled and unscheduled needs and some medical care.

- B -

Bed Pan: A pan used to allow elimination of urine and feces while remaining in bed.

- C -

Catheter: A tube passed through the urethra and into the bladder to drain urine. Other names used are Foley, Foley Catheter and In-Dwelling Catheter.

Chair Bound: Unable to get out of a chair without the help of another person.

Chucks: Trade name for a disposable pad that is soft on one side and waterproof on the other. Used under incontinent persons or under draining areas of the body.

Commode: A portable toilet used in a patient's room.

Continent: Able to control the passage of urine and feces. The opposite is incontinent or unable to control the passage of urine or feces.

- D -

Decubitus Ulcer: A sore or ulcer caused by the lack of blood circulating to some area of the body. This condition often results from sitting or lying in one position too long. Other names are bedsores and pressure sores.

Dehydration: Lack of adequate fluid in the body. A crucial factor in the health of older people.

Diabetes: A condition caused by the failure of the pancreas to secrete insulin. An older person may have poor circulation, poor eyesight or other debilitating complications from this disease.

Dietician: One qualified by training and education in planning menus and regular and special diets, and in establishing dietary procedures.

Disorientation: Loss of one's bearings; loss of sense of familiarity with one's surroundings; or loss of one's bearings with respect to time, place and person.

Diuretics: A class of drugs given to help the body rid itself of excess fluid; often used on older persons with heart disease.

Do Not Resuscitate Order (DNR): A DNR order is a physician's written order instructing health care providers not to attempt cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) in case of cardiac or respiratory arrest. A person with a valid DNR order will not be given CPR under these circumstances. Although the DNR order is written at the request of a person or his or her family, it must be signed by a physician to be valid.

Drainage Bag: A plastic bag used to collect urine from a catheter.

Draw Sheet: 1. A sheet folded and placed under a patient to make it easier to move him/her. 2. A small sheet covering a rubber or plastic sheet on a bed or wheelchair; used under an incontinent person.

Durable Power of Attorney: A Power of Attorney not affected by subsequent disability of the individual.

- E -

Edema: Collection of fluids in tissues that result in swelling.

Empysema: A condition in which the lungs become distended or ruptured.

- F -

Fiscal Intermediaries: Private insurance organizations under contract with the federal government to handle Medicare claims from hospitals, skilled nursing facilities and home health agencies (Part A).

- G -

Geri-Chair: A wheelchair that cannot be self-propelled. It must be pushed by someone else, has a high back, foot ledge and removable dining tray.

Grab Bar: Bars or railings placed around tubs, showers and toilets to be used to steady oneself.

- H -

Hand Rails: Railings placed on walls of halls to steady oneself. Used to improve safety.

Health Maintenance Organization (HMO): An organization that, for a prepaid fee, provides a comprehensive range of health maintenance and treatment services (including hospitalization, preventive care, diagnosis and nursing). HMOs are sponsored by large employers, labor unions, medical schools, hospitals, medical clinics and insurance companies.

Home Health Agency (HHA): A public or private agency certified by Medicare that specializes in providing skilled nurses, homemakers, home health aides and therapeutic services, such as physical therapy in an individual's home.

Home Health Care: Health services provided in the homes of the elderly, disabled sick or convalescent. The types of services provided include nursing care, social services, home health aide and homemaking services, and various rehabilitation therapies (e.g., speech, physical and occupational therapy).

Hospice care: A type of care for treating patients who are in the final stages of terminal illness that focuses on the physical, psychological, spiritual, and existential needs of the patient. Its goal is to achieve the best quality of life available to the patient by relieving suffering, controlling pain and symptoms, and enabling the patient to achieve maximum functional capacity. In addition to providing palliative care and personal support to the patient, hospice includes support for the patient's family while the patient is dying, as well as support to the family during their bereavement.

Hypertension: High blood pressure or elevated pressure in the arteries.

- L -

Laxatives: Medication given for constipation. (Milk of Magnesia and Ex-Lax are laxatives.)

Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN): One who has completed one or two years in a school of nursing or vocational training school. LPNs are in charge of nursing in the absence of a Registered Nurse (RN). LPNs often give medications and perform treatments. They are licensed by the state in which they work.

Living Will: A document that describes a person's wishes with respect to the use of heroic life support measures to maintain one's life.

- M -

Meal-On-Wheels: A program that delivers meals to people who are homebound.

Medicaid: An assistance program through which the federal government and the individual states share in payment for the medical care of certain categories of needy and low-income people.

Medical Power of Attorney: A document that allows an individual to appoint someone else to make decisions about his or her medical care if he or she is unable to communicate. This type of advance directive may also be called a health care proxy, durable power of attorney for health care or appointment of a health care agent. The person appointed may be called a health care agent, surrogate, attorney-in-fact or proxy.

Medicare: A federal health insurance program for people 65 and over and some under 65 who are disabled. Medicare has two parts. Part A is also called Hospital Insurance, and Part B is called Medical Insurance.

Medigap Insurance: These policies are sold by private insurance companies. They are specifically designed to help pay health care expenses either not covered or not fully covered by Medicare.

- N -

Nasal Gastric Tube (NG Tube): A tube passed through the nose to the stomach for the purpose of liquid feeding.

- O -

Ombudsman: A "citizen's representative" who protects a person's rights through advocacy, providing information and encouraging institutions to respect citizens' rights.

Osteoporosis: A disorder that causes a gradual decrease in the strength of bone tissues. Bones "thin out," becoming less dense or more porous, and thus lose strength. The loss of strength can result in an increased incidence of broken bones.

- P -

Palliative care: Palliative care is sometimes called "comfort care" or "hospice-type care." It shifts purpose from healing to comforting.

Patient Co-Payment: The amount of allowed charges that is the responsibility of the recipient to pay.

Personal Care: Care that involves help with eating, dressing, walking and other personal needs but very little or no nursing supervision.

Physical Therapist (PT): A person trained to retain or restore functioning in the musculature of the arms, legs, hands, feet, back and neck through movement, exercises or treatments.

Power of Attorney: The simplest and least expensive legal device for authorizing a person to manage the affairs of another. In essence, it is a written agreement, usually with a close relative, an attorney, business associate or financial advisor, authorizing that person to sign documents and conduct transactions on the individual's behalf. The individual can delegate as much or as little power as desired and end the arrangement at any time.

PRN: An abbreviation used to indicate that a medication is given or treatment performed only as the need arises.

- R -

Registered Nurse (RN): A graduate nurse who has completed a minimum of two years of education at an accredited school of nursing. RNs are licensed by the state in which they work.

Respite: The care of a chronically ill beneficiary intended to give the caregiver a rest.

Restraint: A device used to prevent a person from falling out of a chair (e.g., a belt around the waist tied to a wheelchair or a jacket with straps tied to a wheelchair). A jacket restraint could be used to prevent a person from crawling over the side rails of a bed. Wrist restraints are used under unusual circumstances. Restraints should be used as protection for the patient only when other means are not reasonable.

- S -

Sedatives: Drugs that provide calm and quiet to those in a state of nervous excitement. (Noctec, Nembutal, Seconal, Chloral Hydrate and Phenobarbital are commonly used examples.)

Self-Care: The ability to bathe, dress, toilet and feed oneself.

Senility: Popularized laymen's term used by doctors and the public alike to categorize the mental deterioration that may occur with aging.

Senior Center: A community facility for senior citizens. Senior centers provide a variety of activities for their members including any combination of recreational, educational, cultural or social events. Also, some centers offer nutritious meals and limited health care services.

Skilled Care: Institutional care that is less intensive than hospital care in its nursing and medical service, but which includes procedures whose administration requires the training and skills of an RN. Both Medicare and Medicaid reimburse for care at the skilled level if it is provided in a facility which has been certified as meeting the Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF) standards.

Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF): A facility that has been certified by Medicare and/or Medicaid to provide skilled care.

Social Security: A national insurance program that provides income to workers when they retire or are disabled and to dependent survivors when a worker dies. Retirement payments are based on worker's earning during employment

Social Worker: A person trained to identify social and emotional needs and provide services necessary to meet them.

Spend Down: Under the Medicaid program, a method by which an individual establishes Medicaid eligibility by reducing gross income through incurring medical expenses until net income (after medical expenses) meets Medicaid financial requirements. A person spends down when he/she is no longer sufficiently covered by a third-party payor (usually Medicare) and has exhausted all personal assets. The person then becomes eligible for Medicaid coverage.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI): A federal program that pays monthly checks to people in need who are 65 or older and to people in need at any age who are blind or disabled. The purpose of the program is to provide sufficient resources so they can have a basic monthly income. Eligibility is based on income and assets.

- T -

Third-Party Payment: Payment for care that is made by someone other than the patient or his/her family (e.g. Medicare or private insurance companies).

TPR: Abbreviation for the measurement of Temperature, Pulse and Respiration.

- U -

Urinary Tract Infection (UTI): An infection in the urinary tract, most common in patients with catheters.

- V -

VA: Veterans Administration

Vital Signs: Temperature, Pulse, Respiration and Blood Pressure.

- W -

Walker: A lightweight frame held in front of a person to give stability in walking. It offers more stability than a cane.

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