

# Home Treatment Becoming Popular Option to Nursing Homes

**H**ome care is a general phrase that includes a wide range of social and health services. These services are delivered at home to recovering, disabled, chronically, or terminally ill people in need of medical, nursing, social, or therapeutic treatment and/or assistance with the essential activities of daily living.

Typically, home care is appropriate whenever a person prefers to stay at home but needs ongoing care that cannot easily or effectively be provided solely by family and friends. Increasing numbers of older people are electing to live independently and receive many of the same services they would get in nursing homes. Also, younger adults who are disabled or recuperating from severe illness are choosing home care whenever possible. Chronically ill infants and children are receiving sophisticated medical treatment in their familiar and secure home environments. Adults and children diagnosed with terminal illness also are being cared for at home, receiving compassion and maintaining dignity at the end of life.

As the length of hospital stays decrease, increasing numbers of patients need highly skilled services when they return home. Other patients are able to stay at home to begin with, receiving safe and effective care.

## Home Drug Infusion Therapy

One form of home care is drug infusion therapy. This treatment consists of prolonged (or continuous) injections of drugs that are given in the home, usual-

ly repeatedly. Home infusion therapy puts medications into the bloodstream, under the skin, and into the membranes surrounding the spinal cord.

Equipment used in home drug infusion therapy is typically referred to as durable medical equipment. DME must be capable of withstanding repeated use and appropriate for home use. Examples include intravenous poles, infusion pumps, walkers, wheelchairs, or hospital beds.

The advancement of home infusion therapy occurred as a result of not only the relatively recent development of the necessary equipment but also the increasing need to avoid the escalating costs of inpatient treatment. The home infusion therapy sector continues to expand and is currently estimated to represent approximately between \$4 billion and \$5 billion annually in U.S. health care expenditures.

Common drug therapies administered via infusion include antibiotics, chemotherapy, pain management, parenteral nutrition, and immune globulin. Diagnoses commonly requiring infusion therapy include infections that are unresponsive to oral antibiotics; cancer and cancer-related pain; gastrointestinal diseases or disorders which prevent normal functioning of the GI system; congestive heart failure; immune disorders; growth hormone deficiencies; and more.

## Who Provides Infusion Therapy?

Infusion therapy always originates with a prescription from a qualified physi-

cian who is overseeing the patient's care. The therapy itself is then provided by local pharmacies, hospital-affiliated organizations, regional infusion therapy providers, and national home infusion organizations. Nationwide, there are approximately 4,000 infusion therapy companies.

Pharmaceutical and infusion therapy companies specialize in the delivery of drugs, equipment, and professional services for individuals receiving intravenous or nutritional therapies through specially placed tubes. A provider of infusion therapy must be a licensed pharmacy or work in conjunction with a licensed pharmacy to prepare solutions and arrange for delivery to patients. Typically, nurses are also hired to teach self-administration in patients' homes. The training commonly involves administering the drug therapy, complying with the prescribed dosing schedule, understanding the drug delivery device being used (an infusion pump or other device), and other important information regarding the treatment regimen. For some therapies, a nurse will remain present throughout the therapy. Some pharmaceutical and infusion therapy companies are home health agencies, certified by Medicare.

Remember, your community pharmacist is your medication expert. They are valuable sources of information regarding home care and in many cases provide either some form of it or supply the durable medical equipment that it requires.

*Ask Your Family Pharmacist®*