

focus on

Serious Injury Care

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Attendant care services improve quality of life after serious injuries

After a serious injury, people often have difficulty with everyday tasks that most of us take for granted, such as personal hygiene and eating. Attendant services can help individuals meet their daily needs, keep them safe and enable them to live independently rather than in institutions.

“Attendant care helps enhance a person’s quality of life. It provides them with freedom, flexibility and dignity,” says Frank DiPierdomenico, a case manager and owner of FJD Disability Management/ Consulting in Windsor, Ont. He frequently arranges attendant services for his clients, and continues to act as a liaison between clients and health care agencies.

Family members of injured people, who often take on caregiving tasks, also benefit from attendant services. “For families, it’s very important to avoid the phenomenon known as ‘caregiver burnout,’ which sometimes happens, especially with catastrophic injuries like brain injury,” explains DiPierdomenico. “I encourage families not to take everything on. They need time to regenerate.”

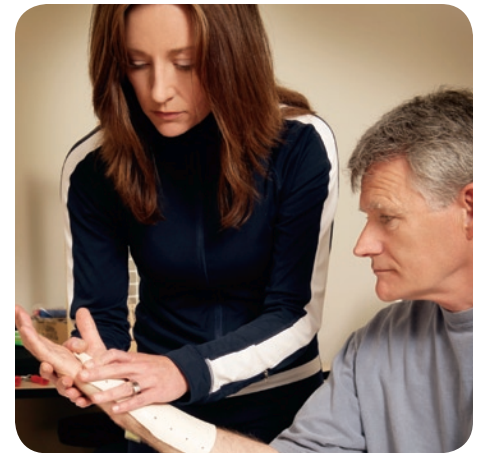
Attendants help with tasks such as dressing and undressing, getting out of bed in the morning and getting into bed at night, personal hygiene and grooming, grocery shopping, meal preparation, eating, taking medicine, transferring (for example, from a bed to a wheelchair), bladder and

bowel routines, exercise, housekeeping, laundry and communication, depending on the client’s needs. Some people require around-the-clock assistance, while others need a few hours a week.

Attendants, who may be nurses or personal support workers (PSWs), provide services in a variety of settings, including clients’ homes, supportive housing, universities and transitional living programs. Services are frequently funded by the provincial government, and people can pay for additional services if they wish. (For information about who is eligible for attendant services funding, contact your provincial ministry of health.)

PSWs are specially trained to provide attendant services. “To become a PSW, a person must complete a course, up to one year long, which is offered at numerous locations,” explains Erin Baldry, Manager of Clinical Practice at the Oshawa branch of Bayshore Home Health, which provides attendant services across Canada. At Bayshore, PSWs receive additional training, such as the company’s acquired brain injury course.

Baldry also looks for employees who are prepared to make a long-term commitment, both for continuity of care and so that clients can grow to trust their PSWs. (To ensure clients have consistent and reliable service, Bayshore assigns up to four



staff members to work in one home.) “We look for someone who’s in it for the long haul, who will stay with the client as long as they’re with Bayshore,” Baldry says. “As with any job in the health care profession, it takes a special person to do it! We look for people who are very reliable, professional and caring.”

Whenever possible, the person with the injury directs his or her own care, is responsible for decisions and trains the attendants. If a person is not capable of managing these areas, someone else steps in. This is either a person designated by the client (through a power of attorney for personal care) or someone chosen by a judge – typically, a family member who applies for the role – explains Dale

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Orlando, a partner with Toronto law firm McLeish Orlando LLP, which specializes in personal injury law. He adds that the court process can take months, so in the meantime, the public guardian and trustee's office may make health care decisions on behalf of an injured person.

Lawyers often assist in arranging attendant services. For his clients, Orlando ensures that applications for attendant services, accident benefits and a needs assessment for attendant care are completed. He hires case managers and checks that his clients are satisfied with their service providers. Lawyers also assist in disputes between clients and their insurance companies regarding how many hours of attendant services they are entitled to.

Case managers such as DiPierdomenico coordinate and monitor individuals' rehabilitation programs. They assist with steps such as discharge planning (when the client leaves the hospital or rehabilitation facility), coordinating physiotherapy and arranging attendant services. Clients have the right to choose their service provider.

It takes time to learn how to manage attendants. It's very helpful when people (or their designated decision-makers) know their needs and how much time is necessary for an attendant to perform required tasks. Skills that can help the process go smoothly include being organized and being able to explain the steps to complete each task. Any needed supplies should be ready for the attendant.

As with any employer-employee relationship, the one between a client and attendant should be one of mutual respect. It's important to understand which tasks are part of an attendant's duties. For example, an attendant is not a counsellor, and is not meant to be a substitute for the company of friends and family members. Attendants also do not perform professional services,

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Bayshore Home Health – a leader in serious injury home care

Bayshore Home Health is a Canadian-owned company and has been a trusted provider of home and community care services since 1966. It operates more than 40 home care offices and 20 community care clinics nationally, and works with many organizations that deliver specialized home care services to clients with serious injuries, including workers compensation boards, auto insurers, rehabilitation service providers and government care agencies. To learn more about any of the services listed below, please call 1-866-265-1920.

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such as nursing, occupational therapy and physiotherapy, or teach life skills.

It is essential to have a plan for days when an attendant doesn't arrive for work (for example, because of illness or a personal emergency) or quits without adequate notice. The plan might include having friends help with meals or grocery shopping, or arranging for a relative to stay with the injured person temporarily.

If clients have problems with an attendant, DiPierdomenico says they can contact their service provider or case manager. "I would contact the company and say we're having certain issues, and try to resolve them as soon as possible."

In many cases, an attendant may be competent at his or her job, but the client is not comfortable with him or her for various reasons. Baldry says that personality conflicts are not uncommon and that Bayshore endeavours to assign PSWs based on clients' needs and preferences. "Whenever we do initial assessments, we always assure clients that if they're not comfortable with someone, we'll do our best to find the right fit," she adds.

Orlando says that it is important to address issues early, rather than allowing them to grow. "I think the most important thing is to keep the lines of communication open," he explains. "There might be a reluctance on the part of the person receiving the care because they don't want to offend somebody... and it gets to be a bigger issue than it would have been if dealt with at the outset. If there are issues, they usually can be dealt with easily."

Learn More

For more information about attendant management, read *After and Beyond Spinal Cord Injury*, a manual from the **Canadian Spinal Research Organization**. To order this free resource, visit www.csro.com/spinalInfo-2.htm (shipping costs \$10-\$20).

To learn about the Independent Living Movement, visit **Independent Living Canada** at www.ilcanada.ca.

Insurance Bureau of Canada provides information on auto insurance benefits for each province and territory. To learn more, visit www.ibc.ca/en/Car_Insurance/Car_Insurance_Where_You_Live.asp.

Financial Services Commission of Ontario outlines attendant care benefits for people injured in automotive accidents in its brochure "Understanding Automobile Insurance." Read it at www.fSCO.gov.on.ca/English/insurance/auto/undautoins.asp.

People who live in Toronto may benefit from visiting the "Attendant Services" section on the website of the **Centre for Independent Living in Toronto**, www.cilt.ca/services.aspx.

To learn about **Bayshore Home Health**, which provides home care services across Canada, visit www.bayshore.ca.