

# **Volunteers and Paid Companions: Invisible Providers of Support for Older Adults in Care Homes and Hospitals (FINAL REPORT)**

by Dr. Laura Funk

Thank you to Dr. Funk for creating such a valuable report about the role of Paid Companions and volunteers in Personal Care Homes

As a business owner, this report gave me some valuable insights for the situations where we care for individuals in Personal Care Homes. Our mission is to increase quality of life for elderly people in their homes wherever their homes may be – in personal care homes as well. This report has given us some information on how to do that even better.

As I read the report, there were several things that stood out for me, and I gained some valuable take away's.

1. The value of paid companions in PCH. Provincial funding is provided for basic physical, medical and some recreational needs of the elderly in PCH, but little beyond that. There are those who need help to participate in basic activities. The social, emotional and relational needs cannot be met. Likewise, if a patient acts out and exhibits difficult behaviors that require more time, the staff being maxed out already simply doesn't have the time to help these patients. This gap in service displays the need for paid companions in PCH.
2. Often when a companion is hired by a family member within a facility, the boundaries are fuzzy, especially in the area of hands on care. The staff is unsure what the companion is there for and may have different expectations than the companion.
  - a. Who are they working for?
  - b. What is their role, or job expectation?
  - c. What is their place, and how will they be accepted by PCH staff?
3. What motivates a companion is not necessarily monetary reward. Many need to feel valued, recognized and appreciated for their work. They find reward in attachments developed with the client; when the connection is lost, their motivation to return lessens.
4. Part of feeling valued is to be heard. They have valuable insights into their client's condition because they have the luxury of extended time with their clients, and a lot of one on one time and attention. They need an outlet to share these insights in a way that they are heard, and something will be done to improve the quality of care.

As a result – we have implemented a couple of things:

1. We send out a letter to the contact, usually a social worker, at the home to outline who has hired us and what the family has hired us for to improve those fuzzy boundaries. The goal of this letter is to improve working relationships and give the companion a place in the PCH. If the other staff can show the companion is valued by them, even better!
2. We let our companions know when they would like to advocate for the client, they are to do that through our office staff, the Client Care Coordinator. The CCC has a relationship with the key personnel at the home and can effect change in this way.
3. The CCC is the key point of contact with the home. They will attend family meetings on the families' behalf, enhancing the working relationships in the PCH.

Comforts of Home – Care has worked with several different facilities to improve the quality of care for their residents. They have chosen us as their only Companion Care Company because of the quality of care and companions we provide. We often work with a point person in the personal care home to arrange shared care for residents who benefit from shorter visits. We are flexible to meet the needs of the facility. It may seem like more work up front to get it all organized, however in the big picture, companion care helps to take a load off the staff and increase quality of care for the residents. The work is well worth it.

Thanks again to Dr. Laura Funk for her valued contributions in this area

By Katherine Peters CEO  
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