

## To Our Clients and Friends...

As of this writing, March was our busiest month to date. Counting live-in days as 10 “hourly equivalents”, Ready Hands delivered over 7200 hours of service. One reason for this growth, we believe, is our personal involvement with clients. Many of them tell us that they value this direct relationship with the owners.

Most home care companies employ “schedulers” or “staffing coordinators” who have not met clients in person. We chose long ago to retain this function ourselves. Staying close to our clients is one big reason we find this work so rewarding!

We appreciate the opportunity you have given us to do what we love.

*Granger Benson, M.D.*

*Sue Benson, R.N.*

## Thank You

As always, we would like to express our appreciation to those people and organizations who have recommended us during the past three months. We can't always identify a specific person who passed on our name, so if we have left you out, **please** let us know!

Capital Hospice, ElderCare Strategies; St. Luke's Episcopal Church; Mr. Jon Strother; Renaissance Gardens; Advanced Care Management; Senior Care Associates; First Presbyterian Church, Arlington; Ms. P.J.Soto; Kaiser Permanente Social Work Department; Ms. Carmell Fletcher; Inova Fairfax Hospital; Mrs. Robert Nelson; Ms. Peg Bixler

## Medication Errors: The “Other” Drug Problem

It's a troubling paradox. As medication breakthroughs offer new hope for treating disease, medication errors are harming more and more Americans. On the plus side, the treatment of virtually every major illness has been revolutionized in recent years by the advent of better agents. Take diabetes. Not so long ago the only drug treatment options were insulin and a handful of fairly primitive oral agents. Today physicians can choose from at least five different classes of pills and ten insulin formulations. At the same time, scientific studies clearly demonstrate that aggressive treatment greatly reduces diabetic complications. Thus diabetes today is often treated with combinations of two or more complementary drugs.

The same is true of many chronic disorders common in our society, especially among older adults. Hypertension (high blood pressure), coronary artery disease, arthritis, cancer, hyperlipidemia, depression and many other disorders are now routinely treated more vigorously and with more drugs than ever before. In the United States, 3.3 billion retail prescriptions were written in 2001. This year the number will approximate 4 billion. Seniors, who represent 13% of the population, account for 34% of these prescriptions. According to



Georgetown University's Center on an Aging Society, individuals between 65 and 79 years of age receive an average of 20 prescriptions each year.

But there's a downside to all this: along with the proliferation of drug treatments there has also been an upsurge in so-called medication errors. One reflection of the problem is the high frequency of discrepancies between what patients are actually taking and what their doctors' records indicate. A 2000 report published in the Archives of Internal Medicine revealed such discrepancies in fully 76% of the patients studied. One big reason is poor communication between patients and health professionals. Another is the woefully

### Margarette Nartey-Ford Wins Quarterly Recognition Award

This quarter our award goes to Nurse Aide Margarette (“Maggie”) Nartey-Ford. Maggie joined Ready Hands in August, 2005. Since then, as a live-in aide, she has shown the kinds of exceptional qualities that Ready Hands truly values and our clients appreciate.

Maggie truly cares about her client. She is cheerful, attentive and compassionate. She goes about her work with a calm, unruffled manner. She never complains, and is always willing to help in unexpected situations.



Recently we needed to assign an aide unfamiliar with Maggie’s client to cover on her weekend off, because the regular relief aide was away. When Maggie learned this, she insisted on working that weekend herself, concerned that her client might not adjust easily to a new aide. Maggie had planned a dinner party for six people that Saturday, but she chose to cancel it and stay with her client instead. That kind of dedication is hard to find, and we are truly grateful. Our warmest thanks to Maggie for being such a wonderful asset to Ready Hands and her client!

### Long-Term Care Costs on The Rise

According to the annual MetLife Market Survey, the average cost of a private room in a nursing home in 2005 was \$203 per day, or \$74,095 per year. This represented a 5.7% increase over 2004’s average daily cost of \$192.

Nursing home costs vary widely by regional market. The nation’s highest rate is found in Alaska, where a private room costs \$531 per day. The lowest is the Shreveport area of Louisiana at \$115. For the Washington area, the rate is \$271.

The MetLife survey also tracks costs for home care aides and homemaker/companions. The national average hourly cost of the former in 2005 was \$19, an increase of \$1 over the previous year. Homemaker/companions cost an average of \$17.

“The rise of these long-term care costs of 5% and more constitute a crisis for many people who have not made the necessary financial preparations,” noted Sandra Timmermann, Ed.D., the gerontologist who directed the study. “As we age, the more likely we are to develop conditions that result in the need for ongoing assistance with activities of daily living. Because long-term care services are so costly and the costs will increase significantly over time, planning for long-term care must be an integral part of the retirement planning process.”

### Tips For Reducing Medication Errors

Medication errors can be prevented. Here are a few suggestions:

- Be an active participant in all treatment decisions. Make sure you understand why a given drug is being prescribed, how to take it safely, and what side effects are possible.
- Keep careful track of any allergies or previous adverse effects from drugs.

---

#### Medication Errors, continued

inadequate record-keeping in our fragmented health system.

Improper use of medications can cause harm as the result of dangerous side effects, drug interactions or inadequate treatment. Medication errors can be thought of as falling into three categories: overuse, underuse and misuse. Taking medications inappropriately (misuse) or excessively (overuse) can of course lead to preventable side effects. But underuse may be just as serious, because patients thereby lose the benefits that state-of-the art treatment can offer.

Medication errors take a staggering toll in terms of complications, preventable hospitalizations, inadequate treatment and even death. In fact, just the preventable deaths (the tip of the iceberg) exceed 7,000 per year, according to a respected 1999 study of medical errors by the Institute of Medicine. For suggestions on how to avoid medication errors, see the tips on this page.

- Bring all medication bottles, prescription and non-prescription, to every visit with a health professional—even if you are not asked. Have someone go over your medications and check for any discrepancies with the medical record.
- If you didn't follow instructions for whatever reason, say so. Don't leave your physician with the impression that you're taking a medication if you're not.
- Don't "self-prescribe" over-the-counter drugs for chronic conditions. The drugs approved for over-the-counter use in recent years are more powerful than ever. Besides causing potential serious side effects independently, they may interact adversely with prescriptions you are taking.
- Use a pill dispenser if you have problems remembering to take your medications at the right time. There are many excellent designs available.
- Ask your physician if a consultation with a pharmacist is covered by your health plan. Pharmacists have been playing a larger role in the health care team in recent years.
- If a doctor advises you to change a medication that another doctor prescribed, satisfy yourself that they have communicated with one another about the change.
- Keep an accurate and current list of all your medications readily available at all times. Include any medication allergies or intolerances. In an emergency, this simple practice can be life-saving.