

To Our Clients and Friends...

In this issue we are pleased to include several articles on the topic of family caregiving. Family members provide the great majority of "long-term care" in the U.S. Sixty percent are women. Thirty percent of those who care for seniors are themselves 65 or older. Seventeen percent devote more than 40 hours a week to caregiving. In the future, the demands on families will increase as the growth of the senior population increasingly outstrips the

availability of family members to provide care.

We are pleased to report that Ready Hands, now well into its sixth year of operation, continues to grow briskly. Most months see record numbers of service hours. We are deeply grateful for the confidence placed in us by so many wonderful clients and senior-serving professionals.

Granger Benson, M.D.

Sue Benson, R.N.

Well Spouse a Great Help to Spousal Caregivers

When one is sick, two need help. This is the important truth underlying the mission of an excellent organization that serves the needs of spousal caregivers. It is called the Well Spouse Association. As the association's website says, "Illness and accident attack without warning and can happen to anyone. No two people are living in the same situation and no two illnesses exact the same toll. Alzheimer's is different from MS, heart disease is different from Parkinson's, stroke is different from accident. But all well spouses face similar problems of anger, guilt, fear, isolation, grief, and financial threat whether they are full-time caregivers or whether their partners have only moderately disabling illnesses."

Well Spouse is non-profit membership organization which gives support to wives, husbands, and partners of the chronically ill and/or disabled. Membership offers several benefits, including: a subscription to the organization's monthly newsletter, *Mainstay*; participation in a Well Spouse support group; discount pricing on Well Spouse publications, as well as regional and national conferences. Well Spouse also offers an online chat forum where spousal caregivers can share experiences and learn from others facing similar situations.

Well Spouse support groups, which meet monthly, permit members to share their thoughts and feelings openly with others who face similar circumstances in an accepting, welcoming setting. They also provide a great op-

portunity for participants to obtain practical information on a range of issues facing spousal caregivers. Well Spouse support groups exist in many areas of the country, including an active group in Northern Virginia.

To learn more about this wonderful organization, call 1-800-838-0879, or log onto the association's website at <http://www.wellspouse.org>.

Sofiya Mergia is Lead CNA

We are pleased to announce that Sofiya Mergia has been promoted to Lead CNA. In this capacity, she helps us "fill in the gaps" in our schedule, so that clients aren't left without help if a regularly assigned aide has an emergency absence. She also helps us start new cases when a permanent aide has yet to be assigned.



Clients are often apprehensive about having someone new fill in for their usual aide. These concerns evaporate quickly after a few minutes of seeing Sofiya at work. She is industrious, faultlessly courteous, cheerful and competent.

Sofiya joined Ready Hands in September, 2006. Her clients have uniformly been delighted with her. We are very pleased she is working for Ready Hands.

Family Caregiving Takes a Toll

In over 22,000,000 households Americans are performing a service of love whose economic value is about \$196 billion per year. They are family caregivers: people who help with the personal care, chores or household affairs for an elderly parent, spouse or relative.

Eighty percent of long-term care is provided by family members at home. Among seniors (the largest group of care recipients) fewer than 10% live in nursing homes or assisted living settings. The rest live either in their own homes, with family members or in residential alternatives.

Most family caregivers describe their experience in positive terms, such as citing the rewards of being helpful to a loved one. Still, the difficulties they face are very real. The term “caregiver burden” is sometimes used to describe the personal toll of providing care.

Caregiver burden may take the form of emotional stress, worry, depression or anxiety. It can also have significant physical manifestations, even increasing mortality risk. It may entail serious financial hardship, disrupted job duties and strained family relationships.

Caregiver burden is highest among those who face the greatest demands, especially if responsible for loved ones with advanced dementia. But another key factor is associated with high caregiver burden: **the absence of active coping and management strategies**. Those who have adopted such strategies report significantly less negative impact on their personal well-being. See below for some important examples.

Tips for Minimizing Caregiver Burden:

- ⇒ Learn as much as possible about your family member’s condition and its effects on him or her.
- ⇒ Protect personal time for activities that you enjoy or are important to you.
- ⇒ Protect your own health. Exercise, get adequate sleep and eat a balanced diet.
- ⇒ Watch out for symptoms of depression such as persistent sadness, lack of interest or pleasure, excessive fatigue or sleep difficulty. Contact your physician if you experience these.
- ⇒ Use your network of friends and family for support, or join a support group.
- ⇒ Get help! Don’t be afraid to ask other family members, friends and neighbors to pitch in. When people offer to help, accept the offer!
- ⇒ Contact your Area Agency on Aging, your church or synagogue or one of the many excellent caregiver support organizations listed in this issue.

Resources for Caregivers

Many organizations provide information and assistance to individuals responsible for the care of a loved one. Following are some excellent examples:

National Family Caregivers Association, 1-800-896-3650. Web: www.nfcares.org. Espouses a philosophy of self-advocacy. Provides support for caregivers and promotes public awareness.

American Association of Retired Persons, 1-800-424-3410. Web: www.aarp.org. Extensive online informational material under “Life Answers”. Type in the search term “caregiving.”

The Well Spouse Association, 1-800-838-0879. Web: www.wellspouse.org. A national non-profit organization that helps spouses and partners of the chronically ill or disabled. Operates local support groups.

National Alliance for Caregiving, 4720 Montgomery Lane, 5th Floor, Bethesda, MD 20814. Web: www.caregiving.org. A joint venture with 38 member organizations, established to support family caregivers of the elderly and the professionals who serve them.

Children of Aging Parents, 1-800-227-7294. Web: www.capsforcaregivers.org. Started in 1977 by a group of neighbors caring for their elderly parents, CAPS has grown into a national organization dedicated to the well-being of family caregivers.

Agatha Adusei Receives Quarterly Recognition Award



There is no kinder or more conscientious aide than Agatha. Since joining Ready Hands in October 2006, she has consistently shown the kind of upbeat, willing attitude that is so important in a good caregiver. She believes in and exhibits high values of professionalism and integrity. Her clients are always pleased with her, and they grow attached to her warm and attentive manner.

Agatha always communicates with our office whenever there are changes in her client’s condition. She responds promptly to calls and is always ready to lend a hand, even on short notice. She maintains and submits proper records of the care she provides, always on time.

Agatha exemplifies the qualities that Ready Hands seeks in our employees. Thank you, Agatha!

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