

To Our Clients and Friends...

One of the major challenges of aging in place is the need for reliable transportation. Since safe public transportation is not an option for many older adults, it is no wonder that many continue to drive beyond the point where this is wise. On page one of this issue on transportation topics, we feature an article on how to recognize signs of impaired driving and what steps can be taken.

On page two we describe some of the

risks associated with transporting clients and how Ready Hands tries to minimize these. We also provide information about Connect-A-Ride, a useful transportation hotline. We hope this information is of interest.

The period from April through June of this year was our busiest quarter ever. We continue to appreciate the trust placed in us by so many area families and eldercare professionals.

—Granger Benson, M.D.

—Sue Benson, R.N.

Should Your Elderly Loved One Still Drive?

It's a fact: car accident rates increase with advanced age. Drivers older than 85 experience an average of 38.8 accidents per million vehicle miles traveled, about ten times the rate for 40-45 year-olds. Sometimes the results are catastrophic, as in California a couple of years ago when an elderly man, confusing the accelerator with the brake pedal, caused ten deaths and over fifty injuries in a crowded farmer's market. Many seniors sensibly curtail their driving, but some don't. What should you do when you suspect impaired driving in an elderly friend or loved one?

Observe Driving Performance

A history of recent accidents or "fender benders" may be all the evidence you need that a problem exists. Otherwise, the first priority is to create non-threatening opportunities to observe driving skills. Look for warning signs like incorrect signaling, trouble navigating turns, hitting curbs, inappropriate lane changes or delayed responses to unexpected situations.

Signs of significant cognitive impairment would be even more troubling. Examples include becoming confused at exits, getting lost in familiar areas, mixing up the brake and accelerator pedals or even stopping in traffic for no reason.

Even if you note nothing of concern, ride in the passenger seat occasionally to catch indications of declining skills over time. Your presence will also seem more natural that way.

Intervene for Safety

If you note problem driving, begin intervening early so as to make driving cessation a gradual transition. Start arranging practical transportation alternatives, like having others drive to church, appointments or social events. Don't be shy about asking relatives or friends to shoulder some of the load. Have groceries and medications delivered. Look into home care or errand services. Use taxis or public transportation if practical.

You should also consider the local government-sponsored services for those with income limitations and/or disabilities, such as Fastran, (703) 222-9764; Metro Access, (703) 523-7009; or Seniors-On-The-Go, (703) 324-1172. Or, contact Connect-a Ride, an excellent free transportation help line offered by the Jewish Council on Aging, at (703) 323-6494. (See page two).

If your loved one won't relinquish the steering wheel, enlist help from his or her personal physician, whose advice may carry more weight. A geriatric care manager, social worker, elder law attorney or clergyman can play a similar role.

If necessary, take the keys or remove or disable the car. Think about reporting the unsafe situation to the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), which will trigger a driving competency exam. The DMV does not reveal the source if notified by a relative, friend or treating physician.

Home Care and Transportation—Managing the Risk

Transporting clients is a controversial issue in home care. On the one hand, it is an important need for many seniors who neither drive nor have family members or friends who can help. On the other hand, a motor vehicle accident could potentially be catastrophic on many levels.

Liability risk is, of course, one concern. Home care companies that provide transportation can carry non-owned auto insurance, designed to protect the company from the risk of having employees drive their own vehicles, or a client's vehicle, in the course of a client's care. However, the primary policy in place on the vehicle being driven is always first in line for liability. This is also the only policy that will fix the employee's car in the case of an accident. Only after the limits of liability on the personal auto policy are exhausted does the non-owned auto policy take over.

The order of policies and their intent brings up several issues in the home care setting. First, for an employee to be fully protected he or she must carry insurance that extends to incidental transportation for a work purpose. However, most employees could not afford the extra premium for a business use rider, nor be willing to risk paying deductibles and other expenses arising from an accident or legal action. Second, a typical employee may see several cases sequentially over the course of a year; only some will have transportation needs, making it unreasonable to expect employees to carry additional insurance continuously. For the employer, attempting to verify that proper additional insurance coverage is in effect at the right time for all applicable employees is a daunting task.

Another issue relevant to the safe transportation of clients is the maintenance status of the employee's vehicle. Low-wage home care workers are often driving older model cars in uncertain condition. In one case in point, a Ready Hands employee reporting for work on a wintry day found

her car sliding down a slightly inclined driveway because all four tires were nearly bald.

Because of the foregoing concerns, Ready Hands tries to adhere to policies recommended by many insurance experts and endorsed by the National Private Duty Association, of which we are a member:

- ◆ A home care aide may not transport or perform errands for a client using the aide's vehicle.
- ◆ When a client requires transportation in the course of home care, Ready Hands obtains written consent for our employee to drive the client's car and verifies primary insurance coverage.
- ◆ If the client does not have a car, the employee may certainly accompany the client using any alternative means of transportation available.
- ◆ Transportation and errands are limited to necessary trips only.
- ◆ Ready Hands does not offer transportation as an isolated service, but only as a component of a home care visit.

We think these policies are ultimately in everyone's best interest. In five years of providing home care we have yet to experience a single driving-related mishap.

Driving, continued

Don't Dodge the Issue

It is stressful to deal with a resistant elderly relative who is a problem driver. Rather than confront the situation, some of us procrastinate and hope for the best. Others try to limit the danger by "riding shotgun" in the passenger seat, long after obvious warning signs have been recognized. Don't make these mistakes. The risks to your loved one and other innocent people are just too high.

Connect-A-Ride— A Valuable Resource for Seniors

Connect-A-Ride is a free transportation "help line" that links seniors with transportation resources in Fairfax and Arlington Counties and in Montgomery County, MD. Certified Information Specialists provide personalized information and referrals to volunteer agencies, private fee-for-service providers and special transportation programs. They can also help plan for future transportation needs.

Connect-A-Ride also offers financial assistance for a limited number of taxicab rides for those who meet income eligibility criteria. Connect-a-Ride is a service of the Jewish Council for the Aging. Calling this service is a great first step for anyone seeking information about the range of transportation options available in our area.

Telephone: (703) 323-6494, M-F, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Bertha Paintsil Receives Quarterly Recognition Award

This quarter, we are proud to announce that our award goes to Bertha Paintsil. Bertha has been with Ready Hands since August 2005. Since then she has worked with many of our clients, both live-in and live-out. Clients have always been extremely complimentary of her kind, gentle manner and reliable performance.

Bertha communicates with the office in advance



whenever she has a conflict with her work schedule, which is rare. She reports her hours on time and is always up to date with her continuing education quizzes. She is always willing to help out when needed. She is a great asset to Ready

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