

HomeCare Options

The Community
Home Care Option
For Over 50 Years

Winter 2010

HomeCare Options Receives CVS \$15,000 Grant

HomeCare Options has received a \$15,000 grant from the CVS Caremark Charitable Trust. The money is earmarked towards the expansion of a medication management program for the agency's aging and often homebound patients.

"We are extremely excited to be selected by CVS for this charitable grant," says Ken Wessel, Executive Director of HomeCare Options. "The money will allow us to double the number of patients we can educate and help become compliant with their medications. This is critical with our population as one out of every seven hospital days is the result of medication issues at home."

HomeCare Options was one of 92 nonprofits around the country and four in New Jersey awarded a total of \$6.3 million from the Trust, whose mission is to provide funding for health care, education and community involvement initiatives in CVS Caremark communities. CVS Caremark is the largest provider of prescriptions and related health care services in the nation.

HomeCare Options' medication management program is designed to send RNs into the homes of people who need assistance with medication issues and reach out to their physicians so that patients remain compliant.

"Since many elderly people see different specialists, who may prescribe medications without full knowledge of what else their patient is taking, a medication management program can make a huge difference by reviewing drug usage, taking an inventory of drugs used and providing a computerized medication review printout," says Wessel.



Joseph Sidor poses with Virginia Statile, program coordinator, after being honored by HomeCare Options for his hours of service in the volunteer shopping program. To participate in the program, call 973-523-1224.

For more information on HomeCare Options' wellness services: Call 973-523-1224

Studies have shown that seniors take an average as many as six prescription drugs and three to four over-the-counter medications.

"Our program is intended to help educate patients on medication use and offer strategies to improve compliance," says Wessel. "This grant will allow us to reach many more people, and help prevent the adverse interactions that can lead to a range of serious symptoms and emergency room visits."

Caring Award Nominations Sought

HomeCare Options is accepting nominations for its annual "Caring Award." The award, introduced in 2004 to mark the agency's 50th anniversary, honors individuals in the community who are dedicated to helping others.

The award is given to an individual who has "selflessly and compassionately given of him or herself to improve the lives of others in Passaic County" either through their job or in community or volunteer work. Last year's recipient, 92-year-old Carmela Mitchell, was recognized for her volunteer work with homebound seniors.

Nominations, including name of the nominee, why they should be considered, and your name and telephone number, can be faxed to 973-523-5228 or emailed to kenwessel@homecareoptions.com. Deadline is April 15, with the recipient to be honored at HomeCare Options' annual dinner on April 29.



William Paterson University nursing students are flanked by their professor Dr. Connie Bareford (left), and Alexis Barry, HomeCare Options Director of Services, at the annual Memory Screening Day, hosted by HomeCare Options.

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Home Health Aides Trained as Dementia Specialists

Maria Motta, an intake specialist at HomeCare Options, hears the anguish in the voices of the family caregivers she speaks to every day.

"Many are having a very difficult time coping," she says. "Yet, they'll do whatever they can to keep their loved one from going to a nursing home."

These are family members who care for elders suffering not only from the physical ravages of aging but also from Alzheimer's disease. Caregivers often find themselves at their wit's end dealing not only with their loved one's memory loss but the disease's other common symptoms: loss of judgment, orientation, ability to understand and communicate effectively and changes in personality and behavior.

To provide these caregivers with a much-needed break, and to help educate them on how they can cope better, the Alzheimer's Association of Greater New Jersey recently collaborated with HomeCare Options on the development of a pilot program – the first in the state – to train home health aides as Alzheimer's specialists so they can better provide services to families throughout Passaic County.

"The training has already made a huge difference in how the aides work with this population," says Motta. "Many of our families don't really understand Alzheimer's, in fact they often feel ashamed about it, and our aides are doing a very good job educating them and teaching them how to communicate better."

Changing Needs

The need for home care providers with Alzheimer's training has never been greater both because of the increase in the number of people with dementia, as a result of a population that lives longer, and the growing desire for families today to keep their loved ones at home for as long as possible rather than institutionalize them.

There are an estimated 5.3 million Americans today with Alzheimer's – with that number expected to grow to 7.7 million by 2030 and to as high as 16 million by 2050.

"As a result, we're seeing a population that is more at risk [of Alzheimer's]," says Ken Wessel, Executive Director of HomeCare Options. "That's why the training has been invaluable and especially timely."

Wessel is hopeful that Medicaid will consider increasing reimbursement for home care workers certified in Alzheimer's.

He's also optimistic that additional monies will be made available to train more home health aides at HomeCare Options as well as at other agencies throughout the state.

"Families often struggle with spouses or parents who have Alzheimer's and knowing they can be secure leaving their loved one for several hours with someone who has been specially trained in this area can make all the difference in the world," says Wessel. "Sadly, we're seeing more and more people who fall into this category."

Emergency System Saves Lives

Ginger Piscitelli doesn't have to be reminded of the "lucky charm" she wears around her neck.

The 87-year-old Wayne woman, who uses a walker to navigate her one bedroom apartment in Wayne, has been unsteady on her feet of late. In fact, it was spending eight hours on the floor of her apartment after a fall several months ago – one that left her unconscious and with a black eye – that convinced her children they needed to find a solution.

They did – deciding on the Lifeline system after earlier devices she used proved unreliable. This became critical when Mrs. Piscitelli again faced adversity, this time suffering chest pains in December as the result of a mini-stroke. By pushing the button on her Lifeline pendant, the two-way voice communication system was immediately activated and her profile assessed. Her son was contacted and an ambulance was dispatched, arriving within minutes to take her to the hospital. Several days later she was released to a subacute care facility before returning home.

"The system was a lifesaver," says Mrs. Piscitelli. "I absolutely feel much more confident now with it."

According to Melissa Laccitiello of HomeCare Options, which offers the device, an increasing number of seniors are now using Lifeline (which has an installation fee of \$50 and costs \$39 monthly).

"We have increased the number of users by about 70 percent since last year," she says. "The children of many seniors tell me this is a small price to pay for the comfort of knowing their loved one won't be left alone in case of an emergency."

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