

SENIORGRAM: SENDING A MESSAGE ON SENIOR ISSUES

Questioning our priorities - the crisis in home care

by Barbara Bodzin, Executive Director, LifePath

Nationwide, there are approximately 3 million home care workers who provide the much-needed care to enable elders and persons with disabilities to remain in their homes. These vital services are typically delivered by highly empathic workers who offer support, companionship and assistance with tasks such as bathing, dressing, housework and shopping. As the aging population continues to grow, the ever-increasing demand for direct service workers is creating a looming worker shortage, leaving many positions unfilled.

Intrinsic to the direct service worker shortage are low wages, limited opportunities for advancement, lack of respect, physically taxing work, inconsistent hours and meager or non-existent benefits packages. Stagnant wages have left 20% of all home care workers living below the poverty level.

Approximately one quarter of these direct service workers are immigrants. Changes in immigration policy and restrictions under consideration by the White House are further fueling the critical shortage of home care staff. The impact to DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) recipients who may be forced to leave the United States, travel bans, deportations and termination of temporary protected status of workers from select countries have negatively impacted an already strained industry.



Many of the people who are home care workers are immigrants, and many more people are needed to address the worker shortage in this vital and growing industry.

The loss of valuable workers is occurring as:

- Legal residents of the United States are moving back to their country of origin when relatives are deported
- Undocumented immigrants, who are a significant part of the “gray market” where clients pay privately and out-of-pocket through an unregulated network of direct service workers are exiting the workforce.
- Home health training programs for Latino immigrants are seeing reductions in enrollments.
- Whole communities are feeling targeted with workers oftentimes wanting to limit their activities outside of the home.

- These dynamics are dissuading program graduates from entering the workforce due to immigration-related anxieties.

“We have a caregiver shortage, and implementing policies like immigration reform is just going to exacerbate that shortage even more,” Carelinx CEO Sherwin Sheik said at a Home Health Care News summit. “We have to recognize who is taking care of our seniors and embrace them, rather than close the door.”

As the number of elders increases relative to the young, so will the growing shortage of workers to provide the care. Our social obligation needs to shift to ensure the security of elders and persons with disabilities through the availability and provision of quality care. Older immigrants should have the option to receive assistance from those who speak their native language. Welcoming immigrants helps grow the home care workforce and enhances the industry with respectful caring attitudes and cultural competencies possessed by workers of diverse ethnic origins.

Only through the development of this workforce and elevation of the status of home care workers will we be able to properly attend to the needs of this population that is expected to soar in the years ahead.

PEER SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE CARING FOR A LOVED ONE WITH DEMENTIA

The Dementia Caregivers Support Group at LifePath is for caregivers of people with memory disorders such as, but not limited to, Alzheimer’s disease.

Facilitated by Molly Chambers, the in-person support group offers participants a place to ask questions, share experiences and resources, and get answers. From time to time, the group views films about dementia and caregiver concerns and hears from speakers, such as lawyers, people from hospice, and local writer and speaker Mo Grossberger with his “Lessons Learned.”

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The support group meets the first and third Wednesday of each month from 5-7

p.m. in the conference room at LifePath, 101 Munson St., Suite 201, Greenfield, MA 01301. The building is accessible, and the group is free and open to the public.

Anyone who is caring for a loved one with Alzheimer’s disease or other forms of dementia can benefit from a support group. “They definitely should join a support group,” says Peter, “and don’t stop after one. The more I went, the more I realized this is something I should keep doing.”

To learn more about the Dementia Caregivers Support Groups and other services available through LifePath, contact the Information & Caregiver Resource Center: call 413-773-5555 or 978-544-2259, email info@lifepathma.org, or visit LifePathMA.org.

INFORMATION AND CAREGIVER RESOURCE CORNER

How to offer support when a loved one is diagnosed with cancer

by Laurie Deskavich, Information and Caregiver Resource Center Program Director

World Cancer Day is an international day marked on February 4 to raise awareness of cancer and to encourage its prevention, detection, and treatment. Having cancer patients be a part of the process from the beginning will help them address their overall needs physically, emotionally and socially. Having a supportive caregiver to get through the diagnosis, treatments, etc. is monumental.

Attention caregivers: this article's focus is to provide helpful tips when caring for a loved one who has been diagnosed with cancer.

Q: What are some ways caregivers can be helpful?

A: When a loved one is diagnosed with cancer, many people feel overwhelmed. Cancer does not just affect the person diagnosed - people involved in that person's life, and especially those involved in their care, are also impacted. By taking certain steps, you'll be better equipped to care for your loved one.

First, remember that communication is key. Keeping the lines of communication open will help all involved. Second, caregivers need to remember to take care of themselves. Without it their own wellbeing could become affected. Third, some find support groups can help cope with the diagnosis along with supporting the mental wellbeing of the patient and their caregivers. Support and understanding from family and

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friends often provides the biggest impact on one's emotional wellbeing.

The nonprofit Cancer Support Community offers ten tips for caregivers,:

1. **Know your support system** – talking to others who are experiencing what you may be experiencing can help manage stress, cope with possible isolation and help you be a better caregiver.
2. **Collect information** – "knowledge is power." Research information about your loved one's diagnosis and what treatments are available.
3. **Understand how your life might change** – many cancer patients and their loved ones express feeling a loss of control after they have been diagnosed. Take time to accept the "new normal" and the changes that may come, one day at a time.

4. **Take a break** – take time to relax and renew. Take a walk. This will help with your stress level and frame of mind.
5. **Make time for yourself** – don't forget you have a life, too. Reach out to friends for support.
6. **Have a plan** – this will give you peace of mind. Think of activities to do during treatments and plan something special to celebrate when treatments are over.
7. **Accept help** – everyone needs help. If someone offers, say yes. This will help more than you think.
8. **Take care of you** – don't forget to stay current with your own medical appointments. Exercise, eat well and get plenty of rest.
9. **Stress management** – meditate, do yoga or whatever makes you feel at ease. Keeping your stress level down is important.
10. **Know your limits** – everyone needs help, including you. Know what you can and cannot do by yourself.

A cancer diagnosis brings change, but patients and their caregivers can take better care of their physical, emotional, and social wellbeing by taking part in the process from day one. To find more information and support, go to www.cancersupportcommunity.org or www.cancer.org.

The Information & Caregiver Resource Center at LifePath is here to help find answers to your questions. To speak with a resource consultant, call 413-773-5555 or 978-544-2259.

"PLAN YOUR PLATE" SERIES

Part 1: Make the shift to a healthy eating style

What's the eating style that's best for health? Is it a Mediterranean eating plan? Vegetarian? Low carb? With all the eating styles out there, it's hard to know which one to follow.

Healthy eating is one of the best ways to prevent or delay health problems. Eating well, along with getting enough physical activity, can help you lower your risk of health problems like heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and more. To reach your goals, experts advise making small, gradual changes.

"The best diet to follow is one that is science based, that allows you to meet your nutritional requirements, and that you can stick to in the long run," says Dr. Holly Nicastro, a National Institutes of Health (NIH) nutrition research expert. "It's not going to do you any good to follow a diet that has you eating things that you don't like."

The main source of science-based nutrition advice is the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. These guidelines describe which nutrients you need and how much. They also point out which ones to limit or avoid.



The Healthy Living program at LifePath is offering several workshops during the 2019 winter season, including a free "Healthy Eating for Successful Living" workshop for people who want to learn more about nutrition and healthy heart and bone strategies. The workshop series covers MyPlate dietary guidelines, water and exercise, label reading, grocery shopping, getting the support of a nutritionist or registered dietician, behavior change techniques, and self-assessment techniques. The next six-week Healthy Eating workshop series starts on February 19 at the Gill Montague Senior Center. To learn more about this and other workshops, contact Andi Waisman, Healthy Living Program Manager, 413-773-5555 x2297, 978-544-2259 x2297, or awaisman@LifePathMA.org, or visit LifePathMA.org/events/healthy-living-workshops.

"Every five years an expert panel reviews all available scientific evidence regarding nutrition and health and uses that to develop the dietary guidelines," Nicastro explains.

The guidelines are regularly updated because our scientific understanding of what's healthy is continuously evolving. These changes can be confusing, but the key recommendations have been consistent over time. In general, healthy eating means getting a variety of foods, limiting certain kinds of carbs and fats, watching out for salt, and being aware of your portion sizes.

Learn more about limiting added sugars, recognizing healthy fats, and limiting salt next week.

Article adapted from the NIH December 2018 News in Health, available online at newsinhealth.nih.gov.

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Join a Healthy Living Workshop Series

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- A Matter of Balance: Managing Concerns about Falls
- Healthy Eating for Successful Living in Older Adults

Workshops are free and are open to people with one or more chronic health conditions as well as their caregivers and loved ones. Stay tuned for next season's offerings!

For more information or to register for a workshop, call 413-773-5555 x2297 or 978-544-2259 x2297, or email awaisman@lifepathma.org. For a complete list and more details about upcoming workshops, visit LifePathMA.org.

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