



February 2010

BULLETIN

of the Allegheny County Medical Society

Opting-Out of
Medicare

Physician
Compensation

Americans with
Disabilities Act

Caregiver Champions: Empowering Informal Caregivers

The recent survey, *Caregiving in the U.S.*, revealed that 29 percent of Americans, or 65.7 million people, serve as informal caregivers for friends or loved ones. In Allegheny County, 45,000 older adults provide routine caregiving help for someone. In order to provide local support, the Jewish Healthcare Foundation (JHF) is launching a new program designed especially for local caregivers.

Caregiver Champions is an initiative to support and empower the many caregivers of frail, older adults in Allegheny County by helping them to care better for themselves, reduce stress and gain access to important caregiving information and resources.

“There has been a dramatic shift in policy, particularly in Pennsylvania, from institutional care for frail elders to new programming that enables adults to remain in their homes as long as possible,” says Karen Wolk Feinstein, PhD, JHF president and CEO. “Yet little attention has been paid to the informal caregivers who now shoulder the physical, mental and financial demands of keeping their loved ones independent.”

Local caregivers can participate in the program two ways. The first way to get involved is by becoming a Caregiver Champion. The foundation is currently recruiting experienced family and informal caregivers. Selected candidates will participate in a facilitator training that will empower them to become a resource of information and support within their own communities. They will learn to advocate, navigate service systems and access tools and resources related to caregiving. The first facilitator training was held in January. Additional trainings will be held over the next few months.

The second way to get involved is by attending Caregiver Salons. Caregiver Salons are free, two-hour sessions that provide practical tools and resources to help caregivers bring better balance to their lives. Hosted by a Caregiver Champion, the salons are designed to serve as a networking opportunity for information, tools and



Pamela Vingle, project manager for the Jewish Healthcare Foundation, and caregiver champions, Roseann Martino and Darlene Beward Perrotta, participate in the first facilitator training for the Caregiver Champions program.

resources. Each session will feature a topic expert. Attendees will learn about several issues, including reducing caregiver burnout, asking for help, accessing local tools and resources and advocating for unmet service needs. Respite services are available during the times that salons are held at no cost to those who attend. The first group of salons will begin in February.

“Our goal is to create a new generation of caregivers,” says Ms. Feinstein. “Right now many caregivers don’t have easy access to the tools, resources and skills needed to care for their older loved ones. We’re going to connect the missing dots so that these people can not only provide better care for their loved ones, but also gain the confidence and control they need to balance their own lives.”

With more than 200,000 residents 65 years of age

or older, Allegheny County is an ideal setting for the new initiative. "Twenty percent of our residents age 65 and over receive support from a formal caregiver. An additional 15 percent of seniors serve as informal family caregivers to other older adults, says Mildred Morrison, director of the Allegheny County Department of Human Services Area Agency on Aging. "This project has the power to impact the overall well-being and quality of life for both our ailing elderly and the unsung heroes who unselfishly care for them each day."

In addition to training Caregiver Champions, JHF will also support local caregivers by developing practical tools and resources: brochures, pamphlets and online references that will provide needed, understandable information and advice.

The *Caregiving in the U.S.* study found that informal caregivers provide an average of 20 hours of care per week—the equivalent of a part-time job—often in addition to having a full-time job and caring for their own families," says Ms. Feinstein. "We need to develop a strong network of tools and resources within our community to help them juggle all of those tasks and

ensure that they don't end up paying the price with their own health and security."

A \$300,000 grant from the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, one of the largest private foundations in the United States, is enabling JHF to launch the program. JHF was one of only 14 community organizations across the country selected by the Weinberg foundation as a grant recipient in the Family and Informal Caregiver Support Program that reinforces many of the key objectives in JHF's own mission. "Since its beginning, JHF has been committed to initiatives that promote the physical and mental health and welfare of aging persons," says Ms. Feinstein. "We have supported innovative solutions designed to moderate the effects of aging through improving care, building strong support systems and providing older adults with opportunities for civic engagements."

To inquire about becoming a Caregiver Champion or to learn more about upcoming Caregiver Salons, contact Beth Polonchak at (412) 594-2569 or polonchak@jhf.org, or Pam Vingle at vingle@jhf.org or (412) 594-2583.

Trust, quality and personal care are the heart of your medical practice. Why should you expect anything less from your medical supply company?



We Offer:

- ◆ A 99% fill rate on more than 80,000 items with 24-hour delivery.
- ◆ A proven cost containment system to control expenses.
- ◆ Expert client service dedicated to rapid response and service excellence.

Contact us to learn how we can help you manage your supplies and costs quickly and easily.

Michael L. Gomber, MBA

More than 30 years of experience meeting physicians' needs

412.580.7900 Fax: 724.223.0959

E-mail: mikegomber@worldnet.att.net

Allegheny Medicare

Henry Schein, a Fortune 500 Company

Together to provide a one-stop solution

for all your needs

Savings, Service and Solutions!
Allegheny Medicare

Endorsed by

ALLEGHENY COUNTY MEDICAL SOCIETY