

Alzheimer's group asks for caregiver relief

Lawmakers are being asked by the Alzheimer's Association to provide family caregivers with support, after a new study by the association showed that they are contributing \$196 billion a year to the nation's health care system.

According to the study, this "invisible" health care sector — the family and friends who provide care at home for the chronically ill — contributes an amount that dwarfs the cost of formal home health care (\$32 billion) and nursing home care (\$83 billion). In Michigan, caregivers are providing services worth over \$7 billion to long term care.

The Alzheimer's Association presented the data to Congress March 23 in order to "underscore the importance of acting immediately to provide family caregivers the support they need," said Dian Wilkins of the Alzheimer's Association Detroit Chapter. It will also be presented to governors and state legisla-

Petition includes \$1,000 family federal tax credit

The Association is calling on lawmakers to:

■ Provide a \$1,000 federal tax credit for family caregivers.

■ Authorize and appropriate \$125 million a year to help states and communities expand respite and adult day care and other caregiver and support services.

■ Provide for the chronic health care needs of Medicare beneficiaries through prescription drug coverage and an adequate home care benefit.

Wilkins said such actions would not only help families but also reduce costs for Medicare and Medicaid.

"We know that timely services like respite and adult day care can extend the ability of families to provide care — sometimes delaying nursing home admissions by almost a year. Even a month delay in nursing home

placement can save \$1,863 per person — and that adds up to savings of more than \$1 billion a year in the costs of Alzheimer's care.

"There is no way we can assure the future of Medicare or control the costs of Medicaid if we let the family caregiving system collapse."

Other research shows that one in eight caregivers becomes ill or injured as a direct result of caregiving and that older caregivers are three times more likely to become clinically depressed than others in their age group.

Employers also have a stake in a reliable structure that relieves the burden of caregivers. A September 1998 study commissioned by the Alzheimer's Association revealed that caregiver absenteeism and lost productivity related to their absence costs employers \$33 billion a year.

Wilkins said one-third of the

\$196 billion can probably be attributed to Alzheimer caregivers.

The study is titled "Economic Value of Informal Caregiving in the United States, by States." It is an analysis of state data from a national study published in the March/April 1999 issue of Health Affairs magazine.

The study was conducted by Peter S. Arns, Ph.D., and Margaret Memmott of the Montefiore Medical Center/Albert Einstein College of Medicine and Carol Levine of the United Hospital Fund.

The Alzheimer's Association is the only voluntary national health organization dedicated to conquering Alzheimer's disease through research and to providing information and support to people with Alzheimer's disease and their families. The Detroit Area Chapter provides a wide range of services to Alzheimer patients and their families.

To contact the local chapter in Southfield, call (248) 557-8277.

Daily, skilled aid is highest level of nursing home care

ON AGING



RENEE MAHLER

seem to be able to get a simple answer.

A. There are three levels of care that I will try to define for you as simply as possible. The highest level is skilled nursing care, the type you would find in a nursing home. Skilled care must be administered daily by licensed medical personnel be they physicians, nurses or therapists. The care must be determined to be medically necessary to the patient's well being. Skilled care can also be restorative in nature. That means that after receiving treatment or physical or occupational therapy the person will hopefully return to the state of health they enjoyed prior to their need for skilled care. Intermediate care is very much like skilled care but this type of care is not usually necessary on a daily basis. Custodial care refers to assistance with such activities as bathing, dressing, eating, grooming or walking. People requiring custodial care usually receive this care from nursing assistants or other non-professional health care workers.

Q. My father is in a nursing home. They are always talking about levels of care. Please define levels of care. I am very confused and don't seem to be able to get a simple answer.

A. I live in Birmingham. My father, who is recovering from a stroke, is coming to live with me. His left side is paralyzed, his speech is not good and he is depressed. I have no idea how to properly care for him. Is there an organized group that will not only help him but that invites families to attend also?

A. The Birmingham Area Seniors Coordinating Council has a support group specifically for stroke victims and their families. BASCC also has support groups for people with hearing or vision loss, an Alzheimer's Family Support group and an Alzheimer's Nursing Home Support Group for families who have a member living in a nursing home.

In addition, this very active center offers a wide variety of programs and activities for older adults including hot meals, information and referral services, housing information, home delivered meals, telephone reassurance and legal counseling to name but a few. For additional information on the BASCC programs and services call (248) 642-1040.

On Aging columnist Renee Mahler is a gerontologist and a former member of the Michigan State Commission on Services to the Aging.

To leave a message for Mahler, from a touch-tone phone, call (313) 953-2047, mailbox 1869.

Send your questions to her at The Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham 48009.

Association holds caregiver workshop

A three-part free caregiver workshop will be held in May by the Alzheimer's Association Detroit Chapter.

The May 6 (6-8 p.m.) program will be devoted to basic information about Alzheimer's Disease and related dementia. May 12 (6-8 p.m.) will be concerned with communicating with a memory-impaired person, and dealing with difficult behaviors. The May 19 (6-8 p.m.) workshop will be devoted to community resources and legal and financial considerations.

The workshop is at St. David's Episcopal Church, 16200 W. 12 Mile road in Southfield between Greenfield and Southfield Roads.

The workshop is presented as a part of the Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Caregiver Education Project funded by Michigan Department of Community Health and United Way. Call (248) 557-8277 to register.

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