

Is it time to consider home health care?

There is growing demand for health care services that are available to the public in their own homes. The reasons have to do with tradition, technology and cost efficiency.

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Home care is the oldest form of health care,

and in a way, it is also the newest. Modern technology has developed to the point where many services that are available in the hospital can now be provided at home. There is significant evidence that it is less costly than other forms of care and that it is the most satisfying form of health care available to the American public. In-home care of elderly loved ones has existed throughout time, and today through significant evolution, is an idea whose time has come again.

In the '90s, when I was looking for someone to take my grandmother to the beauty salon or assist her with meals when she didn't feel up to cooking, I didn't know where to turn. For me, living 300 miles away was a difficult situation as I tried to abide by my grandmother's wish to stay home and yet make sure she was safe and that her needs were well met. As little as 10 years ago, the terms "non-medical care," "geriatric care manager" and "caregiver" were not prevalent in our community. Today, we have many choices.

In 2003, I started All About Home

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Care and joined a small group of home care providers in Newport and Bristol counties. Most of the providers 10 years ago were focused on offering medical home health services, such as a nurse checking your vitals or performing wound care. Today, there are many non-medical and medical services available to the community.

Designed for people living alone in need of additional help with their everyday activities, companies now offer the "choice" of staying relatively independent at home — rather than moving in with a son/daughter, or a nursing facility — while having the services of a private, personally-tailored assistant, chauffeur and companion. A home assistance program is created tailored to each client's personal and medical requirements, and might include light housekeeping, transportation, meal planning, assistance with personal care, and always,

the vital gift of basic companionship.

Founded in 1990, the Rhode Island Partnership for Home Care is the statewide trade association for organizations and individuals who provide or promote health care and supportive services in the home. The partnership now represents more than 40 members. The role of the partnership is to provide a unified voice in the promotion of standards of excellence in home care and hospice services and to advance the position of home care as an integral component of Rhode Island's acute care and long term care health system.

The National Association of Private Geriatric Care Managers was formed in 1985. Membership consisted of approximately 50 members, mostly nurses and social workers. The association was the first to represent the pioneers in the growing and developing field of professional geriatric care managers. A geriatric care manager is a health and human services specialist who helps families who are caring for older relatives. The geriatric care manager is trained and experienced in any of several fields related to care management, including nursing, gerontology, social work or psychology. The National Association of Services and NAPGCM have grown steadily, from 50 members in 1986 to more than 2,000 in 2006.

The role of associations and services such as RIPHC, NAPGCM and GCMs

demonstrate the newness of providing quality home care using supports outside of the family unit. Each group has a focus on ensuring quality assurance and excellence. These groups and many other organizations will help move home care to the top of the list when families are considering, "What do I do now ... Dad's coming out of the hospital," or "How do I take care of Mom, she doesn't remember how to take care of things like she used to?" Rhode Island's Department of Health governs the home health care regulations of all licensed agencies and helps us get closer to providing a safe environment at home for our families that need assistance.

Families now can turn to professionals that are trained, insured, and experienced in home health care, both medical and non-medical, and the choice to stay home becomes a viable option with the systems in place to maintain a safe environment for our elderly.

Kathleen S. Devlin, owner of All About Home Care in Middletown, wrote this piece on behalf of the Newport County Chamber of Commerce, which provides this monthly column. The chamber's "Let's Talk Business" radio show will air on WADK, 1540-AM, on Friday, July 22, from 11 a.m.-noon. For more information, log on to www.newportchamber.com.