

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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View of Homecare

One of the benefits of my legislative job is the opportunity to see many slices of life in our community.

One such opportunity came last month when I accepted an invitation: from Greater Springfield Senior Services Inc. (GSSSI) to accompany a case manager on her visits to client households. We called on three, home-bound residents of East Longmeadow and during those calls I learned first hand of the value of home care services to the segment of the population known as the frail elderly.

GSSSI is a regional provider of the state homecare program. The services can encompass one to 10 hours a week and cover a range of needs including personal care, homemaking, laundry, shopping and companion services. Each client has a quarterly visit from the case manager to assess his or her progress, and that visit was my avenue to observe the program. I accompanied Case Manager Robbie DeMarco on her scheduled rounds,

We first called on a lady who suffered from arthritis. She often used a walker, but was temporarily in a wheelchair because she had fallen in her home. Robbie asked a series of questions to determine any changes in her routine or her medical status. Then she suggested adding a grab bar in the closet where the woman had fallen. The client was cheerful in spite of chronic pain. She kept busy with handicrafts, and her single complaint was that she was not allowed to accompany her homemaker on shopping trips. Insurance regulations will only allow car transportation by a "companion."

Our second stop was at a two-wheelchair household. Robbie was checking up on a disabled wife newly released from hospitalization for a heart attack. Her husband is an amputee. When we arrived, a nurse from the Visiting Nurses Association was giving her transitional care and a shopper stopped in with groceries. It seemed like Grand Central, although the couple had regularly scheduled assistance only three times a week. It was heartening to see the positive attitudes in a couple who were dealing with such physical disability. A police scanner crackled in the background to connect them with the town beyond their walls, and photographs of grandchildren reminded them of the family that was a phone call away.

I was impressed by the upbeat attitudes of these people who were struggling with such physical difficulties. Those attitudes may have contributed to their gracious welcome for me, an unknown state representative. Robbie acknowledged to me that she has many clients who were not so limited physically, but the homes we visited were the only ones who had consented to my presence.

The idea behind home care is that it delivers the assistance that allows people to stay at home when they might otherwise be force into a nursing home. Clients pay between \$5 and \$105 per month, determined on a sliding scale, and the state pays the balance. The total cost is minimal compared to residential nursing home costs, and it seems obvious that the individuals are better off in the familiar independent setting of their own homes.