

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

Protect Seniors' Access to Skilled Home Health Care

May 13, 2014

Dear Colleague,

I would like to bring your attention to the below article that recently appeared in the *Des Moines Register* highlighting the important role that home health care plays in supporting our health care system. The article also highlights the strain that is already placed on the home health care system as a result of the aging of the babyboom generation.

Rebasing cuts implemented by CMS as a result of President Obama's health care law are just going to tax the system even further. According to analysis by the Partnership for Quality Home Healthcare, more than 40% of home health providers nationwide, including 43.8% of providers in Iowa, will be operating at negative margins by 2017.

These cuts to home health services must be reversed in order to protect seniors' access to skilled home health care, and provide them with the support that they need to stay in their own homes.

Sincerely,



Tom Latham
Member of Congress

Demand increasing for paid caregivers

Dolly A. Butz, *Sioux City Journal*; April 19, 2014

SIOUX CITY, Ia. – When they married 31 years ago, Dave Johnson joked that someday his younger wife, Alicia, would be pushing him around in a wheelchair.

The 66-year-old Sioux City man never thought he would instead be taking care of Alicia Johnson, 53, who suffers from congestive heart failure, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma and diabetes. Sometimes her asthma attacks are so severe that she passes out. She was hospitalized nine times last year.

Dave Johnson shuttles his wife to doctor appointments, helps administer her breathing treatments every four hours, cooks meals and cleans the home they put on the market to cover the cost of medical bills.

A year ago, the couple began receiving help from nurses and home health aides provided through Hospice of Siouxland's Palliative Care program.

“They’re like our right arm. We’ve called them for everything,” Alicia Johnson said.

Their story is not unique.

Director Linda Todd said Hospice of Siouxland tries to fill in gaps in health care delivery. As baby boomers age and numerous home health aides and nurses in their 50s and 60s retire, Todd said, the demand for paid caregivers will only increase.

By 2020 Iowa will need 95,000 paid caregivers. The average annual turnover rate for the profession in the state is more than 60 percent, according to the Iowa CareGivers Association. The organization founded by Di Findley, a 13-year nurse aide, estimates that to keep up with the turnover, Iowa employers spent \$193 million to recruit and train new staff in 2012.

“It’s been a pretty invisible workforce,” Findley said. “It doesn’t matter if you’ve been working in this field for a year or even 40 years, they’re still viewed as entry-level workers, and that’s just not right.”

Encouraging people to join the caregiver workforce can be a hard sell. Ninety percent of caregivers in Iowa are women who earn between \$9 and \$11 an hour.

The job involves frequent bending and lifting and has one of the highest rates of occupational injury, particularly to the lower back. In-home paid caregivers in rural areas drive long distances to reach clients’ homes, and those working in long-term care facilities often tend to a high number of patients.

Doris Shoultz, who has worked for Hospice of Siouxland since 1991, said the occupation also takes an emotional toll.

“Some of the hardest things are having people die of your age and younger,” she said. “It’s just very heartbreaking to see the emotional struggles of their families and their friends.”

Last summer, surgeons at Mercy Medical Center in Sioux City amputated Gary Kelley’s left leg. The 66-year-old spent three months at Holy Spirit Retirement Home before returning to his handicapped accessible condo on the city’s east side. Mercy Home Care provided wound care and antibiotic infusions until his wife, Helen, 72, could take over. Without assistance, Kelley said, he doesn’t think he would be able to remain in his home. He developed an infection after surgery.

“Because of the extensive wound I had, if I came home they didn’t think my wife could take care of it,” he said. “At that time I don’t think that she would because it was quite large.”

Medicare no longer pays for the days patients spend in a hospital that aren’t medically necessary. If patients’ needs go unmet after they’re discharged, they’ll end up at the emergency room.

“We see people coming out of the hospital who are very sick. Huge needs. Lots of needs,” Todd said.

Jane Arnold, vice president of operations for UnityPoint at Home, a company that provides a wide range of home care services in Siouxland, said the biggest challenge facing the health care industry is shifting resources from hospitals and long-term care facilities into the home.

“Historically (home care) has been a smaller portion of it,” she said. “Now it’s becoming a larger focus within the health care system and with the changes with the Affordable Care Act.”