



## Supporting Stroke Survivors and Their Family Caregivers *by Diane Walker, RN, MS*

In 1963 the American Heart Association worked with Congress to have February declared American Heart Month. Heart disease and stroke are two of the three leading causes of death in the United States despite medical advances in the fields of cardiovascular disease. Because of these advances, however, fewer people die from a stroke today thanks to improvements in prevention, stroke recognition, and treatment. More than 6 million people in the United States today have survived a stroke, affecting 4 out of 5 American families. That number is expected to increase as the number of older adults in the general population increases.

Advances in medicine and physical rehabilitation have enabled more stroke survivors to return home to continue their recovery. Approximately 50 to 75 percent of all stroke survivors discharged to home still have cognitive and/or motor disabilities that prevent them from living independently at home. Cognitive deficits hinder information processing and interfere with daily tasks such as dressing, toileting, and transfers. Almost all survivors experience depression after

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### Middle Class Task Force Calls For More Funding For Caregiver Support

Vice President Biden's Middle Class Task Force has proposed a number of initiatives in the President's FY11 budget that are aimed at helping families caring for elders and young children. According to Terrell McSweeney, Domestic Policy Advisor to the Vice President, these caregivers are living in the "sandwich generation." They have seen their costs associated with caregiving soar while their incomes have remained static or declined because of the economy. The initiatives include new monies for the National Family Caregiver Support Program, the Lifespan Respite Care Act, and various home and community-based services.

We know that the vast majority of elders prefer to remain at home when they require assistance, and that their quality of life is much higher when they can remain independent and connected to friends and family. Family caregivers provide 85% of the daily care to elders and constitute the backbone of long-term care in the United States. Approximately 65 million Americans are involved in providing care to aging

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### Salt Gets Long Overdue Attention

According to the Wall Street Journal, salt is about to become the new "public enemy number 1." Americans consume far more than the recommended daily salt allowance. A new campaign to reduce salt in restaurants and processed foods is based on new research published in the New England J. of Medicine. Approximately 75% of dietary salt intake comes from these sources. If Americans can reduce their salt intake by 25%, it could save \$24 billion in health care costs and reduce deaths and disability from strokes, heart attacks and coronary heart disease. Read more at

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704320104575015453863612776.html>

#### Special points of interest:

- Pg. 2 - Take Action For MS Today
- Pg. 2 - Older Americans Act Up For Authorization
- Pg. 3 - Health Watch

relatives and almost 23 million are also caring for their own children. The estimated value of their unpaid contributions is 350 billion a year. These caregivers perform services related to activities of daily living such as dressing, cooking, bathing, and transportation that enable elders to remain in their communities at home. Without this help, millions of elders would have a diminished quality of life and many would be institutionalized in nursing homes.

Home care is one of the community-based services caregivers rely on for occasional respite or on-going needs such as help with activities of daily living and companionship. This type of support can greatly lessen the burden experienced by caregivers, many of whom are working full or part-time. Biden's initiatives will increase the monies available for home care. Some home care companies such as *GRISWOLD SPECIAL CARE*, also offer educational information and links to experts in elder care and community resources such as advocacy organizations. *GRISWOLD SPECIAL CARE* is unique in offering its Family 411 website at [www.family411.net](http://www.family411.net) that allows family members to communicate the health status of a loved one and care needs efficiently. They also have a website devoted to the "sandwich generation" to help individuals caring for elders and children.

Vice President Biden's landmark initiatives are being heralded by senior advocacy groups such as AARP and the Alzheimer's Foundation of America. Congress will decide whether to fund the initiatives to bring much needed support and respite to our national treasure: family caregivers; wives, husbands, daughters and sons, who unselfishly enable their elders to maintain their independence and quality of life at home in their community.

Since 1965, the Older Americans Act (OAA) has had a positive impact on the lives of older adults, family members caring for a loved one, and individuals living with a disability. Intended to promote the wellbeing of older adults and help them remain independent in their homes and communities, the OAA allocates 1.2 billion to fund nutrition services, family caregiver support, disease prevention, health promotion, and other services. The Act funds the states to provide information to family caregivers about available services, counseling, respite care, and supplemental services.

Congress will consider reauthorization of the Act including amendments to OAA in 2011. In anticipation of this process, the Agency on Aging (AOA) has planned "listening events" across the country in February. It has also set up a website to enable individuals to submit comments. To learn more about how you can participate in this important process, go to

[http://www.aoa.gov/AoARoot/AoA\\_Programs/OAA/Reauthorization/Index.aspx](http://www.aoa.gov/AoARoot/AoA_Programs/OAA/Reauthorization/Index.aspx).

## Take Action Today For Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Awareness Week

Congress needs to hear your voice to make March 8-12, 2010 **MS Awareness Week**. According to *Federal Focus*,



California Representative Barbara Lee and Pennsylvania's Senator Bob Casey will introduce a resolution to formally recognize MS Awareness Week. The resolution will stress the goals for the week: to reaffirm our nation's commitment to create a world free of MS, to

recognize people living with MS, and to salute professionals and medical researchers who continue to work towards a world free of MS.

You can make a valuable contribution to help ensure

members of Congress understand how important this resolution is to the 400,000 people living with MS in the United States and to everyone touched by the disease. Simply go to the website below to send a message to your congressman in support of MS Awareness Week. By taking this step, you can help raise the awareness of people across the country about the need to continue to work to eradicate the disease and provide support to those who have been diagnosed. Make your voice heard today!

<http://capwiz.com/nmss/issues/alert/?alertid=14678051>



### Health Watch

**Exercise Your Way To A Sharper Brain** - According to the NY Times, one to two hours of strength training exercise per week for a one year period appears to improve cognitive functioning in women 65-75 years of age. Reporting on a new study published in the January 25th issue of Archives of Internal Medicine, women scored higher than those enrolled in balance and toning exercises. The women showed enhanced ability to make decisions, resolve conflicts, and remain focused. The study encourages more strength training in an age group that would not normally do this type of exercise. Adult day care, residential, and fitness professionals can learn more about the finding at:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/26/health/research/26exer.html>

**MyPyramid**—The food and drug administration has come out with a wonderful new tool family caregivers, adults over 65 years of age, and individuals living with a disability can use to plan meals to maintain or lose weight. You simply enter in some basic information about your height, weight, age and level of exercise. The planner then shows you how many calories each food item contains, and recommends the amount of calories you should consume in a day. The website also helps you plan healthy meals. There is even a kid-friendly version. To try out the

planner, visit:

<http://www.mypyramidtracker.gov/planner/>

### **No Social Security Cost of Living Increase Adds Stress For Older Americans**

—According to AARP, older Americans are expecting tougher times in 2010 because there will be no cost of living increase for those on Social Security. To find out more about what AARP is doing to lessen the impact go to: <http://bulletin.aarp.org/>

**Adults With Early-Onset Alzheimer's Are Fast-tracked for Disability Insurance**—On February 11th, the Social Security Administration (SSA) added early on-set Alzheimer's disease to its "compassionate allowance" conditions. After years of criticism for processing delays that could stretch to three years, individuals are now eligible for rapid approval of their SSA benefit claims. Claims that are filed electronically after March 1st will be flagged if the person is diagnosed with AD by a physician. For more information, go to:

[http://bulletin.aarp.org/yourhealth/policy/articles/early\\_onset\\_alzheimer\\_s\\_patients\\_fast\\_tracked\\_for\\_disability\\_pay.html](http://bulletin.aarp.org/yourhealth/policy/articles/early_onset_alzheimer_s_patients_fast_tracked_for_disability_pay.html)

## **Support For Stroke Survivors And Caregivers** *continued...*

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their stroke effecting the individual's confidence and motivation to continue the recovery process.

Nothing can prepare stroke survivors or their family members for the sudden, often catastrophic, effects of a stroke. Some common concerns include:

- ◆ The survivor will have another stroke
- ◆ Spouses won't be able to accept the changes caused by the stroke
- ◆ Family members aren't prepared to face the responsibility of caring for a stroke survivor
- ◆ Friends and relatives won't be able to provide assistance when it's needed most.

Concerns such as these can make caregiving very stressful and it make it difficult for family caregivers to manage alone. According to the Family Caregiver Alliance, 76% of family caregivers need respite from caregiving including help with transportation to rehabilitation appointments, errands, meal preparation and in-home care. Spouses and children who work full time may also worry about leaving the survivor alone for extended periods each day.

These issues can make planning for a safe and timely discharge difficult for healthcare professionals. With greater emphasis placed on consumer-directed services, healthcare professionals are increasingly faced with clients who want to return home to continue their recovery and the need to make this transition safely. One community resource that discharge planners and rehabilitation professionals can offer to families is non-medical homecare: agencies provide families complementary services that can make the difference in whether the survivor goes home safely or requires continued long-term care in an institutional setting. Professional caregivers can provide much-needed respite and/or daily assistance with activities of daily living. These caregivers can make the transition from hospital to home easier on

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**Stroke** *continued...*

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everyone because trained caregivers can anticipate the needs of the survivor and encourage:

- ◆ as much independence as possible with prompts and reminders
- ◆ cognitive retraining and decision-making
- ◆ fall prevention
- ◆ regular exercise
- ◆ the use of new techniques and devices to transfer, dress, and ambulate safely.

To learn more about these complimentary services visit [www.GriswoldSpecialCare.com](http://www.GriswoldSpecialCare.com) and [www.CaringTimes.org](http://www.CaringTimes.org).

National Stroke Association. Retrieved from [www.stroke.org](http://www.stroke.org) February 3, 2010.

Quaney, B., Boyd, LA, McDowd, JM etal. (2009) Aerobic Exercise Improves Cognition and Motor Function Poststroke.



**CARING TIMES© and Its Companion Web Page Services**



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The **CARINGTIMES©** newsletter and its companion website are a service GRISWOLD SPECIAL CARE offers to clients, family caregivers, and professionals who care for older adults and individuals living with a disability. Experts in gerontology keep you current with helpful articles, legislative updates, tips on

caregiving, news about organizations and more.

- ◆ Preventing Caregiver Burnout
- ◆ Tax Related Issues
- ◆ Legal Documents: POA and Living Wills
- ◆ Dementia: The Disease and New Hope for Treatment, Parts I and II
- ◆ Home and Community Based Care: What Consumers Want And Need

**On-line Caregiving Resources**

Our website ([www.CaringTimes.org](http://www.CaringTimes.org)) serves as a resource center that is designed to help make it easier for you to care for your loved ones in the home. At this site, you will have access to past newsletters, articles about elder care and disability issues, direct access to experts who you can talk with about your personal issues and concerns, and links to national organizations that offer support to family caregivers. Check the website each month for the latest information. Here are some of the features that are currently posted:

- ◆ A brochure to prevent falls at home
- ◆ Welcoming A Caregiver Into Your Home

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