

Agencies form new network to support family caregivers

Seven agencies link together to co-ordinate services

Wednesday October 8, 2008 -- Camille Jensen

Family caregivers will have greater access to enhanced services through a new network established by seven agencies in the Central Local Health Integration Network (LHIN).

The Family Caregiver Connections Project, initiated by Circle of Care and Baycrest, aims to support family caregivers by offering a streamlined and co-ordinated approach among the different agencies.

The network has created a hotline to provide information about the agencies and direct the caregiver to the most appropriate services.

Devora Schwartz-Waxman, Circle of Care's family caregiver connection co-ordinator, says after reviewing the programs and services available among the agencies they realized they could be doing more to support the caregiver, who plays a critical role in helping seniors age at home.

"A caregiver's experiences can be very difficult from stress, isolation, financial strain, emotional strain and health problems that can result from caregiving," says Schwartz-Waxman. "We are hoping to address those issues through the program and the services that we are offering."

The network will raise awareness of the family caregiver's role and encourage them to access services. Caregivers are often an under-recognized and silent population that pay more attention to caring for their loved ones than themselves, notes Schwartz-Waxman.

"A lot of people don't identify (themselves) as caregivers – they think it's my mom, my husband, my wife (and) this is my responsibility. They don't really see themselves in that role and therefore don't seek out the supportive services that they really need," she says.

The seven agencies plan to enhance the programs they offer with new services and work to reduce barriers that may prevent a caregiver from participating. The agencies are developing new specialized services to address gaps in the system, such as support groups for Russian-speaking caregivers and education workshops that benefit the caregiver and care recipient.

Transportation services and respite will also be offered at a subsidized rate to encourage caregivers to access services.

The network was made possible through Aging at Home projects funded by the Central LHIN.

"Funding and support of this project reflect the government and community's commitment to supporting seniors for whom diverting and delaying admission to long-term care facilities is possible if appropriate community support services are provided," said Schwartz-Waxman in a press release.

The seven agencies participating in the project are: Circle of Care, Baycrest, Bernard Betel Centre, Chai Tikvah Foundation, Jewish Family and Child, Jewish Immigrant Aid Services Toronto (JIAS) and Reena.

The hotline for caregivers is now open for calls at 416-373-4093.