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ABC in Action, Supporting the Community

Celebrating the Season at the Arlington Senior Center

We celebrated the season on Tuesday, December 22nd with seniors at the Arlington Senior Center. Along with sponsoring a mouth watering turkey dinner, the team from ABC brought holiday cheer, music, presents and the Loren & Wally road crew. Santa, Rudolph and an Angel topped off the day's festivities handing out presents to all and posing for holiday photos.



Holiday Staff Party

ABC hosted their 2nd annual Christmas party. The night was a thank you to their caregivers. Party was held at the Pearl Street Station in Malden where a buffet dinner, awards and door prizes were given away. For 1 caregiver there was a special gift for all her support and willingness to help out at the last minute. Suzanne received a GPS unit to help her navigate her way to new clients. It was a night of festivities and fun. See story on page 2

In-Service Training

ABC provides regular ongoing In-service training to all staff. Each

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the ABCs of Homecare

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Happy New Year!

With the new year comes new beginnings. Resolutions are made, some large and some small. One resolution I would suggest is that we laugh a little more. While laughter is simple, it has big benefits including improving our overall health. We had the opportunity this month to hear how laughter can also get us through the tough times. In his book *The Healing Power of Humor* by best selling author, Allen Klein tells how he used humor to help get through his wife's battle with cancer and a positive attitude can help get us through the tough times. To learn more about the benefits of laughter read *Laugh Yourself Healthy* on page 6.

David Young Hong from the New England Chapter of the Multiple Sclerosis came to ABC to speak about MS. We learned more about the disease and ways that we can help those impacted by the disease. We've pulled together some of the highlights from David's presentation to share with you including ways you can help support the goal of finding a cure.

January is Glaucoma Awareness Month. Did you know that over 2 million people have glaucoma but half of them don't even know it? Knowledge is power when it comes to your vision. Getting regular eye exams can help save your sight. We've included tips to help protect your eyes, because once vision is lost as a result of glaucoma, it cannot be replaced.

With the cold weather upon us we also included some local resources for winter needs. In times like these it's important to know help is available and how to get it. Please share this information with those who can benefit from it.

Wishing you good health and happiness in 2010.

Jeannette Sheehan, MSRN
Board Certified Family Nurse Practitioner
President and CEO

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ABC in Action

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year we offer interesting topics relating to patient care to keep our caregivers current in their field. Recently, the team had the opportunity to learn more about Multiple Sclerosis and also the Power of Laughter. Highlights of these in-services are below, expanded articles can be found inside this newsletter.

Multiple Sclerosis

David Young Hong from the New England Chapter of the Multiple Sclerosis presented a program designed for caregivers. He told us what MS is, what the treatments are and about the quality of life issues MS creates. Also David provided us with tips for those working with MS patients. It was an interactive program and well received by our staff. For more information on MS, see pages 3 and 4.

Laugh Yourself Healthy

Stephanie Isabel, from Affinity Hospice of Life spoke to us about the amazing power of laughter. We learned how our approach to life impacts those around us. If you can look at life with a "glass half full" attitude and smile more you might be able to get through the tough times a bit easier. You'll also help others around you get through their own challenges. Best selling author, Allen Klein, *The Healing Power of Humor* found strength in his wife's humor during her 3-year battle with cancer. The ability to laugh at annoyances, crises, and even outright disasters can literally save your life. Studies on laughter prove that white blood cells increase after laughing which helps with healing and /or fighting off illness. There is actually a hospital in NYC that has clown visit patients 3 times a week. There's many more benefits to a good laugh, see the full story on page 6.

ABC Team Celebrates the Season

Early in December, ABC Home Healthcare hosted an annual holiday party at The Pearl Street Station Restaurant in Malden to show our appreciation to our hardworking employees. A night of good food, good company and employee recognition was enjoyed by all!

After a delightful dinner, awards were given out to honor the ABC employees who have gone above and beyond. Suzanne Robinson, a very dependable caregiver was awarded a GPS! Other awards were given to employees who have reached five years of service with ABC. These caregivers included Jean Howard, Kathy Rutigliano and Theresa Long. We also recognized Clare Papagallo, RN for her five year anniversary and immense dedication.



Carole Devine presents Five Year Service Award to Theresa Long

Everyone had the opportunity to enter the drawing for door prizes and the table centerpieces. During the holiday season we wanted to remind our employees that we could not be successful without them. We appreciate all they do!



Jean Howard receives her Five Year Service Award



Bridget Wandell, Suzanne Robinson (Dependability Award recipient), Clare Papagallo and Kathie Stande



Barbara Busbee and Jason Swiger



Frederick Mbaziira, Marsha DiPerri, Sirene DeOliveira enjoy the festivities

What is Multiple Sclerosis?

The Center for Disease Control defines Multiple Sclerosis as “A slowly progressive central nervous system disease characterized by disseminated patches of demyelination in the brain and spinal cord.” Just what does that mean? Incredibly Multiple Sclerosis (MS) manifests differently in people. It is unpredictable and can be relatively benign, disabling, or devastating, where the individual becomes unable to walk, talk or write.

The two most common types of MS are:

- Relapsing - Remitting where the symptoms flare up and then ease or even disappear for months or years.
- Progressive where the symptoms get steadily worse over time.

French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot first described MS in 1868. In the 142 years of research since then there has still been no known cause or cure for it. Fortunately, there are treatments available that help manage the symptoms and slow the progression of the disease.

While the exact cause of MS is still unknown, we do know that MS is more common in people between the ages of 20 and 50 with more than twice as many women as men having the disease. It is more often found in temperate areas (the further from the equator, the more cases of MS).

It is important for us to all know about MS because it affects more than 400,000 people in the US. Someone is newly diagnosed every hour in the United States with MS. Chances are you may already know or will know someone with the disease. My first encounter with MS came at age twenty when my college roommate was diagnosed with the disease. In the ten years that followed I saw two additional friends diagnosed with it as well. What can you do? First, put yourself in their shoes. If they've recently been diagnosed they may feel they're on an emotional roller coaster. Anxiety and depression are common. It's important to be there for them emotionally. Family and friends can also help a loved one live more comfortably by helping with household chores, errands and/or financial support.

Tips for Helping Someone with MS

- It's important to know that warm temperatures make MS symptoms worse and can cause flare ups. Don't let them overdo it.
- Fatigue is a big problem for many people with MS, so it's important to take lots of rest breaks throughout the day - before they get exhausted.
- Encourage them to eat a well balanced diet and avoid skipping meals. Water is also essential to avoid dehydration.
- Be patient! Some people with MS have memory troubles - it's not their fault.

For more information visit the National MS Society at nationalmssociety.org.

Symptoms of MS

Every case of Multiple Sclerosis is different. MS symptoms vary from person to person and even vary from time to time in the same person. Symptoms can be mild or severe, flare ups can be brought on by heat and humidity.

Some symptoms may include:

- Muscle stiffness or spasms
- Eye problems (vision loss, blurred or double vision, etc.)
- Weakness or unusual tiredness
- Numbness or tingling
- Dragging of feet, staggering, or loss of balance
- Shaking (tremor)
- Poor coordination
- Loss of bladder or bowel control, or sexual problems
- Problems with memory, concentration, or problem-solving skills
- Speech problems
- Partial or complete paralysis of any part of the body

Treatments for MS

While there is no cure currently for MS, a lot can be done to help those with the disease live more independently, comfortably and productively.

Treatment for MS might include:

- Medication to slow the course of MS and also control some of the symptoms.
- Maintaining good health habits including well balanced diet and exercise.
- Physical therapy
- Occupational therapy
- Speech therapy
- Counseling

For more information visit the nationalmssociety.org

SOURCE: National Multiple Sclerosis Society

Help Create a World Free of MS

There are numerous fund raising events throughout the year in New England including WalkMS, BikeMS and the MS Challenge Walk. The success of the events relies on thousands of people participating, raising funds and volunteering their time. There are smaller events throughout the year as well.



There's a need for volunteers outside the events as well including office help, education, advocacy and support programs. To find out more visit MSnewengland.org.

How ABC Can Help with MS

While Multiple Sclerosis impacts each individual differently, ABC Home Healthcare can help. Every client is unique and we work with you and your doctor to develop a personalized care plan. From Home Health Aides and Homemakers to Nurses we are here to help you live more comfortably.



Not looking to hire a full-time caregiver? Not a problem! ABC Home Healthcare can also provide respite care to provide family caregivers with time away. Respite care is available for 1 hour to 24 hours. Long term respite is available to help with vacations or unforeseen long term needs.

For more information on any of our services including the Respite Caregiver Program please call ABC Home Healthcare at (781) 245-1880, or email us at info@abchhp.com.

Glaucoma Awareness

Glaucoma is an eye disease that causes the loss of sight by damaging the eye's optic nerve. The nerve sends messages from your eyes to your brain. When the nerve is damaged by glaucoma, you begin to lose patches of vision. Unfortunately you may not notice a lot of vision loss until it is too late. Your vision cannot be restored once it is lost. Prevent Blindness America® estimates that more than 2.2 million Americans over the age of 40 have open angle glaucoma, the most common form of glaucoma. And unfortunately, half of those don't even know they have it.

More than 2.2 million people have open angle glaucoma... half of them don't even know it.

(Prevent Blindness America)

Grow Older With Good Vision

The number one thing you can do to help prevent blindness and save your vision is to have your eyes tested every other year. Even if you do not have any trouble with your vision. If you have diabetes you should do this more frequently. This is essential as there are some eye diseases that do not produce noticeable symptoms in their early stages. Only your optometrist can tell if you have them.

Other things you can do to help protect your eyes include:

- Wear sunglasses or a wide brim hat / visor to shield your eyes from the sun or bright light.
- Wear eye protection when playing sports or working around your home.
- Improve the lighting within your home so you can see better without straining your eyes.

Lastly, be informed. Talk to your doctor about the various eye problems that you might encounter as you get older. Understanding the possible problems, the symptoms and how you can protect your eyes is one of the best ways you can be proactive about your health. You'll also be able to discuss any concerns when you meet with your doctor should you notice something in your vision changing.



Resources for Winter Needs

With the economy in recession and budget cuts, and cost increases people may be worried about paying for basic services, especially heat. Here is a list of several sources that can help pay for fuel, weatherize homes, and assist with heating system repairs.

<p>The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) helps low-income households pay their heating bills. Both homeowners and renters in MA may apply for this program.</p>	<p>For more information or to find out if you qualify, call the Massachusetts Heat Line at (800) 632-8175 or log onto http://www.massresources.org/massachusetts_energy_assistance_d.html</p>
<p>Citizens Energy Heat Assistance Program provides financial assistance to MA residents who cannot afford their heating bills. The Oil Heat Program gives a voucher of 100 gallons of free oil per heating season to low-income families and elderly residents. The Citizens Energy Distrigas program gives a \$150 credit to eligible households who heat with natural gas.</p>	<p>For more information on these programs, call (1-877-563-4645 or visit Citizen's Energy at www.citizensenergy.com.</p>
<p>Good Neighbor Energy Fund provides heating and utility cost assistance to individuals who are facing a short-term financial crisis and do not qualify for other fuel assistance programs.</p>	<p>To request assistance, call (800) 334-3047 (if you live in the area codes of 508, 617, 781, 978) or call (800) 262-1320 (for the 413 area code). More information available at www.magoodneighbor.org/assistance.html</p>
<p>Utility Arrearage Program helps MA households pay overdue utility bills, prevent utility shutoff, and restore utility service that has been shut off.</p>	<p>Contact (800) 392-6066 or log onto www.massresources.org.</p>
<p>MassSAVE is an energy saving program for MA homeowners and renters which offers tips and information about free home energy assessments, energy-saving products, loan rebates, and other incentives for energy-saving home improvements.</p>	<p>To learn more, contact MassSAVE at (866) 527-7283 or visit their website at www.masssave.com.</p>
<p>Weatherization Assistance Program provides eligible MA households with full-scale home energy conservation services. Typical weatherization activities include: air sealing to reduce infiltration; attic, sidewall and floor insulation; pipe and/or duct insulation; limited energy related repairs.</p>	<p>For additional information about Weatherization call the HEATLINE at 1-800-632-8175</p>

Tax Relief for Seniors

In these economic times, ABC urges all seniors age 65 and older to see if they qualify for the Circuit Breaker Tax Credit.

What is the Circuit Breaker Tax Credit? Allows qualifying seniors to claim a credit of up to \$960. Homeowners may claim the credit if they paid more than 10% of their total income for real estate taxes, including water and sewer charges. Renters can count 25% of their rent as real estate tax payments.

For more information, go to massresources.org/taxcredits. You can also call the Massachusetts Department of Revenue with questions about filing for the Circuit Breaker Credit. The DOR's toll-free number is 1-800-392-6089. The DOR Teletypewriter number is 617-887-6140.

Pre-Paid Funerals are on the Rise

Whether people want to spend down the money in the bank or want to maintain control of things and take the financial burden off their loved ones, recent findings on Southcoasttoday.com indicate pre-paid funerals are on the rise. Some plans even let you lock in at today's prices which can save you money as prices continue to rise.

Whether you decide this is right for you be sure you know all the details and let your family know of your plans. Work with a reputable funeral home and discuss what happens in the event the funeral home goes out of business.

Don't want to prepay? You can put money aside in a savings account, or CD and let your beneficiaries know that the proceeds are dedicated to paying funeral costs.

Laugh Yourself Healthy

We've all heard the expression "laughter is the best medicine." Well, that turns out to be true. Spending 1-2 minutes a day laughing is an effective way to expand your energy and improve your overall health.

Studies show that the act of laughing lowers blood pressure, releases endorphins which are natural pain killers, and increases oxygen levels in the blood stream helping you to breathe with ease. It also relieves tension and anxiety which in turn reduces stress to your immune system.

Laughter is said to help with anti-aging, and considering the cost of the anti-aging skin creams they sell I'll take a good chuckle any day. They even say that laughter

burns calories, comparing it to several minutes of light cardio exercise. Now that's a workout I can get used too! There's even a yoga meditation Hasya Yoga, known as laughter yoga, which uses group breathing exercises to increase mindfulness.

**Spending just
1-2 minutes a day
laughing is an
effective way to
expand your energy
and improve your
overall health.**

Have you ever laughed so hard your stomach ached? Well that's

because the physical act of laughing engages the muscles that hold up the organs in your abdomen.

Sadly, it's said that children laugh 300-400 times a day while adults only laugh 17 times a day.

You don't have to pay for laughter, it's free of charge. Within all of us we have the ability to laugh. You have a choice on whether or not you choose to use it. Considering the benefits, I think I'll tune into *Everybody Loves Raymond* and get my dose of anti aging.

Research from "The Physiological Benefits of Laughter,"
Neurochemistry Department, UC
Berkeley

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**We want to hear from you.
Is there a topic you want
to know more about?
Call or email us.
Your topic may be a
feature in our next
ABCs of Homecare!**
