

## ***Educating Seniors: Bring Your Health... Home (Vol. 1, No. 1)***

*A Monthly Column by Kimberly Harmon, RN, BSN*

Only a fortunate few can claim that their job chose them and not vice versa. The former bring a passion to their jobs that others simply cannot match. For years, I have been telling people that the profession of nursing chose me, rather than me choosing to be a nurse. For me, nursing is a calling. That's why I am delighted to present to you this column, *Educating Seniors: Bring Your Health... Home*.

With more than 12 years of hands-on, practical nursing experience, I am passionate about educating seniors and caregivers. Through this monthly column, I will share my expertise with you, my fellow Auburn area residents. It's just one of the ways I hope to help you understand why it's critical for you to have in your life qualified, attentive, knowledgeable and experienced health care providers—before you confront a health care crisis.

In a moment, you'll discover exactly why this is so important. But first, here are some startling facts about the increasing demands on our nation's health care system, and—more alarmingly—the growing cost of making sure you and your loved ones have access to effective, high-quality and attentive health care.

Nationally, demand for home care is growing rapidly. In the year 2000, an estimated 12,800 home health agencies served approximately 8,600,000 patients across the US. By 2005, home health agencies served an estimated 1 billion patients/clients.

Locally, in Worcester County alone (according to the 2005 Census), there are estimated 293,927 households with one or more individuals 75 years or older. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently reported personal health expenditures to be 33% paid by the federal government, 11% paid by state and local governments, 36% paid by private health insurance, and 16% by consumers "out of pocket".

The way we pay for medical care is changing. Medicare, state level funding, and HMO's are tightening up funds that used to be available to consumers. Long gone are the days of having a visiting nurse care for a patient for months, even years.

Six out of 10 people will need some type of home health service at some point during their lifetime.

Massachusetts has loose regulations that govern private health care agencies—meaning almost anyone can establish their own private agency.

With more than 12 years of nursing, I am honestly frightened by the last fact. It means that you might never really know who's coming into your house to care for you or for your loved one. There's just very little oversight of private health care agencies. With so much money flowing into the health care system, and so little oversight, there are bound to be some unscrupulous health care providers.

You've read about them in the newspaper—perhaps seen the stories on TV—and you think it couldn't happen to you. You see, unscrupulous health care providers rely on the fact that seniors are trusting people. They'll often try to sell you a bill of goods that don't meet your health care needs. Sometimes they'll unknowingly sell you a 'solution' that worsens your specific situation.

The challenge is, with so many options, it's tough to know which option is right for you.

In this column, you'll discover how to determine which option is right for you and your loved one. You'll get specific guidance on what questions to ask a prospective home health care provider, what documentation a provider should have (at a minimum), and what you can do to verify the prospective provider can do what they claim. You'll learn how to protect your hard-earned dollars and get high-quality, affordable and caring home health care. Finally—and most importantly—you'll also find out concrete actions you can take to invest in your own health—before you face a health care crisis.

Over the next couple of months, be sure you read this column to discover ten things to avoid when choosing a home health care provider, critical home medical safety issues, and five home health care provider 'must-haves'. You'll find out about resources available right here in Auburn (and surrounding towns), various types of home care agencies, alternative medicines, easy-to-understand descriptions of emerging medical practices or techniques, and an informative three-part series on private agencies versus homecare registries: How knowing the difference makes *all* the difference.

Remember, the essence of home health care is to provide individuals, families and loved ones with services that promote maximum comfort and independence in the home. Please contact me at [kharmon@harmonhomecare.com](mailto:kharmon@harmonhomecare.com) or 508-791-5600 if there are any specific health issues about which you're curious or concerned.

*Kimberly Harmon is the Founder & CEO for Harmon Home Health, Inc.*

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