

December 7, 2009

RVNA helps those in need keep independence, dignity

BY HEIDI KERR-SCHLAEFER
Berthoud Weekly Surveyor

For 30 years, the Rehabilitation and Visiting Nurse Association, or RVNA, has been helping people to stay living independently at home, and for their clients, there's no place like home.

The nonprofit was founded in Greeley when a nurse with the Weld County Health Department saw a need for such an organization. Today, RVNA has 110 employees with offices in Fort Collins and Greeley. Their staff travels throughout Northern Colorado providing home health and personal care services.

RVNA sees patients of all ages, from high-risk babies to people with disabilities to the elderly. The organization is Medicare and Medicaid certified and takes private insurance. RVNA is independent, but they are affiliated with the Visiting Nurse Association of America.

Sheri Sauer, director of patient services, has been with RVNA for 20 years. She said typical referrals come from hospitals, physicians' offices and

other agencies. RVNA does assessments, wound care, therapy and a variety of other services, including medication instruction and basic personal care.

Like many nonprofits across Colorado and the nation, RVNA has seen a rise in patients unable to pay for their services.

"There's been an unbelievable increase in need," Sauer said.

RVNA received a few referrals a week in the past but now averages six to eight referrals a week and has a waiting list of about 30 individuals needing services without the ability to pay.

The other difficulty is time. It can take months for Medicaid benefits to begin and, in the interim, patients cannot pay for the services. Even the high costs of private insurance deductibles recently have caused trouble for some patients.

As a recipient of Empty Stocking Funds, RVNA has used those funds to assist patients who are unable to pay for services.

"Most of the funds we get from the (Empty Stocking Funds) we use for our unskilled services, which is our personal care and homemaking services," Sauer said.

Services include helping an individual around their home, doing daily tasks such as bathing, laundry, light housekeeping and running errands outside the home, such as picking up groceries and filling prescriptions.

Part of RVNA's 2009 Empty Stocking Funds went to help an elderly Berthoud man who lost his Medicaid.

"He was getting our services, a nurse was coming to set up his meds for him once a week so he would take them correctly. He also had a personal-care provider come in and help him with his personal care and homemaking two or three times a week. Then, he lost this benefit," Sauer said.

The man was able to get his Medicaid reinstated, however, and in the interim, RVNA was able to use the funds from the Empty Stocking Funds to bridge the gap and continue his services as usual.

In another case, RVNA helped a stroke victim who didn't have health insurance.

"The hospital called and said, 'We can't keep him any longer, but he needs someone to take care of him.' He couldn't go to outpatient care because he didn't have the money for that," Sauer said.

RVNA was able to provide the man home care and therapy using the Empty Stocking Funds until Medicaid eventually took over paying for the services.

Sauer said keeping a patient in his or her home often is more cost effective than the alternatives. In addition, patients have a better sense of independence if they are able to stay at home instead of living at an assisted living facility or at a nursing home.

To learn more about Rehabilitation and Visiting Nurse Association, visit www.rvna.info, or call (970) 330-5655.

Additional Facts

A chance to give to neighbors in need

Throughout the holiday season, the Coloradoan, Windsor Beacon, Loveland Connection and other regional media have joined together with the Northern Colorado Empty Stocking Fund to raise money for nine human service agencies in Larimer and Weld counties. Stories on the agencies appear each Monday, Wednesday and Saturday. Contributions will be partially matched by the El Pomar Foundation. Secure credit card contributions may be made at www.nocoemptystocking.org or by calling 211. Checks can be mailed to Northern Colorado Empty Stocking Fund, P.O. Box 466 Fort Collins, CO 80522.