

# more and better options to live at home when you need care

by Kris Carlson MBA/RN, owner of A Plus Health Care

Kristina is a middle age woman with several health concerns. Until recently, Kristina had frequent visits to the Emergency Room and had very frequent and violent migraines amongst other complications. But something is changing in the world of long term care and Kristina is a wonderful example of how new health care models can help people.

More and more seniors and people with disabilities or long term health problems chose to live in their home, rather than in a facility or institution. New insurance and government programs support this trend. Living at home can save health care related cost, but it can also increase people's quality of life, if there is sufficient support. And in the same way that it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a village to care for our disabled neighbors and aging elders.

To be healthy and happy is more than being free from disease. Regardless of your physical state, people need social interaction, exercise, a nourishing environment, a something useful to do and things to look forward to. Some of these needs are filled by support from family, neighbors and wonderful community based initiatives. Other needs will be met by services like home care, family doctors, meals on wheels, senior centers, public transport and the like.

The key to success in making this all work for people that need significant care is to truly make the care about the person and to combine medical care with prevention and community integration. This is why many new health care programs are person centered and offer services like socialization, wellness and transportation as well as home health support. In the case of Kristina, she finds that her health has really

improved now that she is in a new Medicaid program that not only provides her with good home care, but also allows her to go to the pool for exercise and receive special therapy to help prevent her migraines and other issues.

But person centered care is more than just services provided, it is also about *how* it is provided. The relationship between a client and the care provider is what makes or breaks a person's care. That in turn is largely affected by how caregivers are supported and honored to do the important, physically and emotionally demanding but also fulfilling work they do; many are our modern day heroes.

With lifestyle related disease still on the rise and a growing group of aging Montanans, the amount of people needing long term care is like an approaching tsunami. In order to keep as many people in their home and their community as possibly we need to all come together and work as a team.

Kristina, the person we started this story with, is feeling a lot better now that she receives her new services. She and her beloved caregiver are so tuned into the early warning signs of her migraines, that she actually has fewer and less violent migraines. She hardly ever visits the Emergency Room anymore and doesn't need all of the drugs the doctor prescribes to her. The services didn't just increase her quality of life and her cost of care, but Kristina now feels like she is once again a part of her community and can actually contribute to other people's lives again; and isn't that what we all need? ■

For privacy reasons, a fictional name was used for the real person in this article. The article was provided by Kris Carlson MBA/RN, owner of A Plus Health Care, proudly serving Montana's home care needs for over 23 years. If you have questions about this article, please approach Tanya Douglas, Program Manager A Plus Health Care, Helena.

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