BATTLING DEPRESSION WITH COMPASSION Home Care “Angels” Offer Seniors Hope

By Visiting Angels | Mar 14, 2013

Media reports, often driven by pharmaceutical companies, would have you believe there's an epidemic of clinical depression among virtually every population from children and teens, to adults and seniors.

While there's no denying that the number of people suffering from depression is large and spans all ages, too many people with quite normal sadness brought on by grief, loneliness, or other situational issues are treated as if they have a permanent chemical imbalance.

Although anti-depressant medications can make you feel better regardless of the cause, there are healthier alternatives that both address the depression and help provide a much better overall quality of life.

David Forman, President of Visiting Angels a home care company that helps seniors maintain their independence at home says, "The vast majority of seniors suffering from depression are those living alone. Companionship, for even a few hours a day can be as effective as anti-depressant medications in helping someone through and beyond any period of pain and suffering.”

Forman agrees there's nothing wrong with the use of anti-anxiety and anti-depressant medications for shorter-term treatment during periods of grief, but adding additional medication to a daily regimen of other medications is clearly not the best long-term solution.

“There's an important difference between simply living without anxiety and depression vs. actually living with some amount of happiness, interest and joy,” says Forman. “Medications can mask our anxiety and pain, but they can't create new opportunities for a happier existence.”

His company Visiting Angels provides compassionate caregivers that help seniors and disabled adults with all activities of daily living such as personal care, light housekeeping, meal preparation, errands, and transportation, and this helps people stay independent and safe at home, but it’s the companionship Forman says that his “Angels” provide that really adds to a person’s joy in life.

“Just a few hours a day, or even a few hours a week, can make all the difference to somebody living alone, especially those who had a spouse or other companions throughout their lives,” says Forman.

Studies confirm the common sense notion that loneliness significantly raises the risk of loss of physical functioning and earlier-than-expected death.

The New York Times recently published the details of a report from the Archives of Internal Medicine that showed that over a period of six years, nearly 25% of seniors feeling isolated and lonely, experience a significant decline in their ability to perform activities of daily living; to bathe, dress, eat, toilet and get up from a chair or a bed on their own. Lonely older adults also were 45 percent more likely to die within this period than those who felt meaningfully connected with others.

Andrew Steptoe, director of the Institute of Epidemiology and Health Care at University College, London, has been studying this subject and said, “There is growing evidence that both loneliness
and social isolation are related to biological processes that may increase health risk, including changes in immune and inflammatory processes and disruption of the stress-related hormones."

Another study from Cornell University on the physiological effects of loneliness showed that the blood pressure of older people rises in reaction to some kinds of stress and that loneliness accentuates this response.

Forman says his “Angels” are chosen not only for their experience and skills, but also for their compassion and kindness.

“We listen to families’ needs and preferences and do our best to pair proper personality types. The personal connection between our “Angels” and our clients is just as important as the personal services they provide.”

It is also important to note that medical conditions and prescription medications can cause depression. According to helpguide.org, an online health and lifestyle resource, an illness may have depression as a symptom or be a psychological reaction to a chronic condition especially if it is painful, disabling or terminal.

These include: Parkinsons, stroke, heart disease, cancer, diabetes, thyroid disorders, vitamin deficiencies, Alzheimer’s, lupus, and multiple sclerosis.

Medications that can cause or worsen depression include:

* Blood pressure meds
* Beta blockers
* Sleeping pills, including PM pain meds like AdvilPM or TylenolPM when used long term
* Anxiety meds (i.e. Valium, Xanax, Halcion)
* Calcium-channel blockers
* Medication for Parkinson's disease
* Ulcer medication (e.g. Zantac, Tagamet)
* Heart drugs containing reserpine
* Steroids (e.g. cortisone and prednisone)
* High-cholesterol drugs (e.g. Lipitor, Mevacor, Zocor)
* Painkillers and arthritis drugs
* Estrogens (e.g. Premarin, Prempro)

If you feel depressed after starting a new medication, talk to your doctor. You may be able to lower your dose or switch to another medication that doesn’t impact your mood.

Forman says his caregivers normally recognize symptoms of depression, and can alert family members so that it can be properly addressed.

“All too many people are truly suffering unnecessarily, when identifying the problem and a bit of companionship can make a world of difference.”

Nobody should have to face depression alone. From a few hours a week, to 24/7 care, Visiting Angels compassionate caregivers can help. Call (302) 329-9475 or visit visitingangels.com/sussexde