

NEWS RELEASE (short version)

For Immediate Release
July 2005

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Maine Home Care Agencies Working to be an Employer of Choice

“Direct care health workers are increasingly difficult to find, and once you find them they are increasingly difficult to keep” *

Four Maine based home care agencies will implement programs focused on homemakers, personal care attendants/personal support specialists and certified nursing assistants: Anytime Services for Seniors (Hollis Center), Ask for Home Care (South Thomaston), Home Companions Association of New England (Saco), and Hummingbird Home Care (Warren). Maine is one of several states awarded grant funds to demonstrate and evaluate solutions to the shortage of direct care and support workers to serve elders and people with disabilities. The Employer of Choice Program for Finding and Keeping Direct Care Workers is part of the Direct Service Worker Demonstration Grant and the Direct Care Workforce Study being coordinated by the Muskie School of Public Service and Pathways to Higher Education at the University of Southern Maine. The federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services is funding the grant through the Maine Governor’s Office of Health Policy and Finance.

Joan Reed, RN and owner of the Hummingbird Home Care agency is participating in this program to become an employer of choice.

“We are very excited to be part of this program. Our Personal Service Professionals are the heart of Hummingbird Home Care. They deserve an employer who works as hard to take care of them as they do to take care of their clients. The Employer of Choice Program is affording us the financial and professional support to create and maintain an ongoing program that is deserving of our employees.”

For more information please contact Elise Scala, 228-8423, scala@usm.maine.edu

* *Finding and Keeping Direct Care Staff*: Catholic Health Association and the Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute, Copyright 2003 ISBN 0-87125-262-7

NEWS RELEASE (long version)

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July 2005

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Maine Home Care Agencies Working to be an Employer of Choice

“Direct care health workers are increasingly difficult to find, and once you find them they are increasingly difficult to keep” *

Maine is one of several states seeking solutions to the shortage of direct care and support workers to serve elders and people with disabilities. Selected home care agencies will be participating in a grant funded program to demonstrate and evaluate programs to recruit and retain their direct care staff. Federal funds awarded to Maine by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services for a Direct Service Worker Demonstration Grant will be used to implement and evaluate the Employer of Choice Program for Finding and Keeping Direct Care Workers. Four agencies will implement the programs focused on the homemakers, personal care attendants/personal support specialists and certified nursing assistants: Anytime Services for Seniors (Hollis Center), Ask for Home Care (South Thomaston), Home Companions Association of New England (Saco), and Hummingbird Home Care (Warren). These agencies are also participating in the Direct Care Workforce Study, a evaluation being conducted by the Muskie School of Public Service at the University of Southern Maine (USM). The direct care workers are key participants in the project and coordination services will be provided by USM’s Pathways to Higher Education Program, a leader in workforce development initiatives in Maine.

It is essential for home health and home care agencies to determine why direct care and aide employees are difficult to recruit and retain. By understanding this, agencies can work to create a workplace where quality direct care staff will choose to stay employed. This is important not only to the bottom line in the business but is a critical component to the quality of care that is provided for clients and their families. This project will support and enhance the participating agencies’ recruitment and retention efforts by providing management information, management tools, and a thorough analysis of the dynamics of turnover among agency based direct care/service workers. The results will also be used to inform policy makers regarding the need to support this workforce and the agencies that employ them.

Maine’s growing population of people aged 65 and older and the demand for home based services places home health and personal care aides top on the list of job openings for years to come. The agencies filling these jobs must compete with the retail, fast food and telemarketing businesses to recruit and hire staff. The other jobs often pay higher wages and offer benefits that home care agencies can not afford. But, people who choose to work in direct care are making a commitment to caring for others. The work is rewarding but is also very difficult and many direct care workers leave. To ensure high quality services to long term care residents and clients these employers are seeking ways to improve the quality of the direct care jobs, are listening to their direct care staff and finding ways to value and support their direct care workers.

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