

Area Agency on Aging *Connections*

Care management program gives seniors greater “options”

By Daniel Casciato
For *Pittsburgh Senior News*

After her knee operation four years ago, Phyllis Hardison, 69, found that she was unable to move around as she once did. Also, some of her routine daily activities became more difficult. Then Phyllis discovered OPTIONS.

A counselor from the Penn Arbor Apartments where she lives suggested that she contact SeniorLine through the Allegheny County Department of Human Services Area Agency on Aging (ACAAA). In carrying out their mission to serve Allegheny County seniors, ACAA supports the continuance of seniors living at home by offering OPTIONS, a care management program that assesses their needs and coordinates services to address them. ACAA contracts care management with one of four agencies: Hill House Association, Lutheran Service Society, Life Span, Inc. and Ursuline Senior Services.

By receiving nursing visits, help with bathing and grooming, light housekeeping and other services through OPTIONS, many seniors have been able to remain in their homes, despite declining health.

The first step to receive care management services through OPTIONS is to call SeniorLine at (412) 350-5460. “It’s really simple to navigate through the system,” says Roxann Tyger, program director for Ursuline. “After you call SeniorLine and are screened for eligibility, one of the care management agencies is notified electronically; then we make contact with the individual to set up an appointment with a care manager.”



Chuck LeClaire/Pittsburgh Senior News

Phyllis Hardison in the hallway of her apartment.

Once the call to SeniorLine is made, it’s a quick turnaround process. “Typically within a day we get the referral; the care manager has 10 working days to meet with the senior for a home visit,” Roxann says. “We try to contact the senior the day we assign the case to schedule the appointment for a comprehensive assessment.”

An assessment is done to determine the senior’s functional needs and level of care they require to maintain an independent lifestyle. The care manager works with the senior and their family to create a service care plan that addresses their needs, arranges for services, and continues to monitor changes in their needs.

ACAAA and their partner agencies conduct assessments from a strength-based approach. “We try to see what the consumers are doing for themselves,” explains

Kara Newmeyer, OPTIONS care management supervisor for ACAA. “What formal and informal supports are currently in place that we can build upon? And then we can supplement that and pretty much keep consumers as active as they are.”

The wide range of services available through OPTIONS include Personal Care, Homemaking, Home Health Aides, LPN and RN services, Respite Care, Senior Companions, Personal Assistance Service, Chore Services, Adult Day Care, Home Delivered Meals, Home Modifications and Medical Supplies. “We go to the consumers’ homes and assess their needs and try to provide services as best as we can,” says Rhonda Freyvogel, care manager from Ursuline, who managed Phyllis’ assessment. “We provide whatever services we feel are necessary such as homemaking and personal care. If they are

lonely, we’ll find them senior companions. If they need medical supplies, we’ll get them. We do anything we can to keep them safe and comfortable in their own homes.”

Through OPTIONS, Phyllis receives help taking a bath, washing clothes, buying groceries and keeping her house clean. “I really couldn’t have survived without them,” she says. “By the grace of God, I got the best help. You weren’t feeling you were imposing. They were very kind to me and wanted to help.”

Nearly 4,000 seniors in Allegheny County currently use OPTIONS. In order to be eligible, a person must be age 60 or older. There is a shared cost based on a sliding fee scale. Depending on their monthly income, seniors may pay a monthly fee for services they received in the previous month.

“It’s an invaluable service that they provide and I hope more people learn about it,” says Phyllis. “It makes seniors feel independent because we can still stay in our own house and keep our pride.”

For more information, call SeniorLine at (412) 350-5460. *PSN*

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