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WCF launches first-of-its-kind interactive help for area caregivers

Caregivers learn, share through telephone learning sessions

San Antonio, Texas – WellMed Medical Management today formally launched a free interactive program to help area caregivers who face enormous stress and challenges in caring for a loved one.



The **Alamo Caregiver Teleconnection** is the first of its kind in the United States. The WellMed Charitable Foundation received a three-year, \$600,000 grant from the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation to fund the project. Its goal is to improve the quality of life and well-being of caregivers in Bexar County. The program's key features include:

- **Tele-learning:** Free telephone sessions on a variety of life-changing topics with professional caregiving experts, providing an opportunity for caregivers to share information with each other.
- **Alamo Service Connection (ASC) Call Center:** Information and assistance line on all services for the elderly, disabled and their caregivers in Bexar County.
- **Care Coordination:** Caregivers with complex needs will have access to in-home assessment by Jewish Family Service, leading to referrals for mental health counseling and other support services as needed.
- **Leeza's Places by WellMed:** Safe, homelike centers where caregivers and loved ones can gather for education and support. Two in San Antonio -- the Bob Ross Senior One-Stop (Babcock and Huebner) and Northern Hills (O'Connor & Nacogdoches).

Caregivers can call (210) 877-7987 [866-390-6491 toll free] for more information and to register. Or they can register at www.caregiverteleconnection.org.

Increasing numbers of people are becoming caregivers for family members, but many feel isolated and often helpless. Studies show caregivers can suffer from stress and severe depression. The Alamo Caregiver Teleconnection connects caregivers with professionals and other caregivers community-wide.

To bring the program to life, WellMed partnered with Alamo Service Connection, Bexar Area Agency on Aging, Jewish Family Service, and Leeza's Place by WellMed. The program is based upon the successful CareRing Voice Network in Montreal, Canada, where 96% of tele-learning participants are repeat users.

Demographics and Ethnicity

- 59-75% percent of caregivers are female.
- The majority of caregivers are middle-aged (35-64 years old).
- Of those caring for someone age 65-plus, the average age is 63; One third of these caregivers are in fair to poor health.
- In a national study that looked at people receiving care who were 70+ years old, 44% of Latinos were found to receive informal home care compared to 34% of African-Americans and 25% of non-Hispanic whites.

Health Concerns

- Studies have found that caregivers may have increased blood pressure and insulin levels, may have impaired immune systems, and may be at increased risk for cardiovascular disease among other adverse health outcomes. Many die before their care recipient.
- Elderly spousal caregivers (aged 66-96) who experience caregiving-related stress have a 63% higher mortality rate than noncaregivers of the same age.
- Studies consistently report higher levels of depressive symptoms and mental health problems among caregivers than among their noncaregiving peers.
- 20-50% of caregivers reporting depressive disorders or symptoms.

Future Trends in Caregiving

- The population aged 65 and over will more than double by 2030 and the likelihood of someone achieving age 90 or older has also increased by the same levels. In 2050, 40% of 65 year olds will live to age 90 or older.
- As a result, the need for caregiver support programs will dramatically increase over the coming years.
- Adequate support for caregivers now and in the future means fewer proportional outlays of public dollars for institutional care.

Sources: Family Caregiver Alliance, National Center on Caregiving, www.caregiver.org; National Family Caregivers Association, www.thefamilycaregiver.org

The WellMed Charitable Foundation (www.wellmedgives.org) is a non-profit 501(C)3 organization that supports seniors and their caregivers in our community with special emphasis on wellness, prevention and living with chronic illness. Established in 2006 by Dr. George M. Rapier III, a noted geriatrician and the Chairman of the Board, the Foundation has contributed more than \$3 million to the San Antonio community.