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**Highlights from NAHC's Annual Meeting:
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Spreading Holiday Cheer the Techie Way

By Merrily Orsini, MSSW



The holiday season is one of the busiest times of the year for home care agencies, and it is a particularly challenging and stressful time for patients and their families. However, today's agencies have an advantage in that technology has made it easier to reach out to clients in a personal — albeit digital — way. Websites and social media outlets are increasingly the top places that busy families and professionals turn to when searching for quick information. Why not tailor your sites and newsletters with holiday tips and information this season as a way of offering a little online assistance, and a bit of holiday uplifting to boot?

Here are some great ideas to “dial down” the stress of the holidays for your clients’ families and provide them with helpful and festive information mixed with a little holiday cheer.

- **Blog, tweet, and/or post daily ideas on Facebook that detail ways to integrate frail seniors into festivities.** Families often find themselves scrambling to come up with ways to involve their elderly loved ones in holiday festivities. During the weeks leading up to the holidays, post one activity per day that all family

members, including frail seniors, can participate in, such as taking a drive through town to look at decorations, playing a holiday-themed board game, scrapbooking old family photos, or making holiday decorations.

- **Send out an e-newsletter with local holiday events appropriate for seniors.** With all the rushing around that the holidays entail, many families miss out on fun local holiday events. Become a resource for your clients and their families by sending out an online calendar listing of holiday events that are senior/frail/elderly appropriate; remember to post the information on your website as well, and link your e-newsletter back to the website listing. Some event ideas include:

- Holiday parades;
- Holiday craft fairs;
- Holiday-themed plays/shows at local theaters or churches;
- Local symphony or ballet performances;
- Tree lightings; and
- Travelogues for viewing at lo-

cal senior centers, churches, or neighborhood associations.

- **Create a coupon highlighting holiday specials.** Use your agency's e-newsletter to send out a coupon for care that a client or family member can purchase for a friend or loved one. You can also offer a holiday discount on your rates for your clients as a “gift from our family to yours,” or inform your clients of seasonal discounts at local restaurants and shops to help get them in the holiday spirit.
- **Add some holiday spirit to your website.** Referral sources and families come to your agency website to gather information, phone numbers, etc. Make the site more welcoming by adding a holiday message from the agency owner or photos of special things caregivers have done for patients and clients during the holidays. One agency we at Corecubed know of has a “Giving Tree” program and during the season delivers to its clients gift baskets with needed items. Add a form on your website to solicit those who might be in need of attention or food items through the

holidays, and match them with local or agency volunteers. Add photos of your caregivers in holiday dress or performing holiday activities.

- **Be a healthy resource.** Cooking is a large part of holiday tradition, but for families of seniors with dietary restrictions, creating fun festive meals can be a challenge. Use your e-newsletter or blog to post healthy, holiday-friendly recipes for your clients and their families, or help them modify their own recipes by posting a list of healthy alternative ingredients. To help families with too much on their plate already, you might also provide a list of local restaurants or grocery stores that prepare holiday meals for pick-up or delivery. This way everyone can enjoy the flavor of the season.
- **Help your clients stay organized.** The holiday season is the time for planning and rushing, and often disintegrates into mayhem. Take the pressure off of your clients' families by providing helpful links to online holiday organizers and planners. Organizedhome.com offers free printable shopping lists, housework checklists, and calendars to help the festivities run smoothly.
- **Link your clients to shopping alternatives.** For families of frail seniors who simply cannot handle the hustle and bustle of a shopping center, online shopping can be a

lifesaver during this busy season. In your agency's e-newsletter, inform your clients of this time-saving shopping method and provide links to trusted online retailers such as Amazon, Buy.com, eBay, and Barnes and Noble.

- **Include holiday safety information in your e-newsletter.** Winter can be a dangerous time for frail seniors, both inside and outside the home. Ice and snow pose obvious injury risks that most people know to beware of, but less obvious concerns include tripping hazards in the home such as Christmas toys, electrical cords, or rugs. Making sure that your loved ones' heating and electric bills are being paid on time is also important. Use your e-newsletter to inform family members of safety tips to ensure a safe and happy holiday.
- **Use a survey to gather feedback.** As the year comes to a close, it's a good time to get a reading on the overall care and effectiveness of your agency, both for your sake and for the continued satisfaction of your patients/clients. By sending them a brief survey or posting one on your website, you can gain valuable information about your agency as well as your marketing strategies. Keep questions simple and to the point and make sure the overall survey is brief, so as not to overwhelm your clients during this busy time. Inquire about

your clients' satisfaction with your services and with the information on your social media sites, and include an area for comments or suggestions for improvement. With this information, you can continue to build your company with an eye on client and patient satisfaction.

- **Use all of your social media outlets.** This may be the only time of year that some families are able to spend with their elderly loved ones, so it is natural for them to turn to your agency for guidance. Be a support system for your patients and their families during this hectic time by sending or posting information on anything related to the holidays, and link this information to your website throughout the season.

Remember that your social media outlets can work for you in many different ways. Be creative and thoughtful this time of year with your communications and you'll see a wonderful response.

About the Author: *Merrily Orsini, MSSW, is managing director of corecubed, a marketing communications company that specializes in monthly marketing programs for the home care and home health industries. Merrily has been active in Internet marketing since its inception. She is an 18-year veteran of the private duty industry, is chair of the Private Duty Home Care Association, and is on the board of the National Association for Home Care and Hospice. Orsini is a frequent national speaker, and for further marketing tips can be followed on her blog at www.MerrilyOrsini.com or on Twitter @MerrilyO.*