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*Home Care &
Hospice Celebrate*

It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year for In-Home Care

By Merrily Orsini



With the holiday season in full swing, it's easy for people to get lost in the hustle and bustle of decorating, shopping, cooking, and traveling. Unfortunately, it's also easy for families to forget to include their less mobile relatives and friends in holiday traditions. Many private duty clients live away from their immediate family members and are unable to participate in festive activities, while others may simply not have the mobility to take part in festive activities. But no one should feel overlooked during this holiday season. The holidays are one area that allows private duty agencies to sparkle during this special time of year — bringing joy to homes and creating ways for clients to enjoy the holidays and feel part of the celebration.

Learn and Emulate Traditions

The holidays are all about traditions — the rituals that make this time of year so special and fondly anticipated. Elderly in-home care clients likely revel in the familiarity of their own family traditions, but may not be able to participate as much as they'd like. During the weeks before the holidays, caregivers can gather information on clients' happiest holiday memories and customs. Perhaps, while helping clients decorate or bake traditional recipes, caregivers can coax clients

to reminisce on what they like best about this time of year, what crafts or festivities they would like to participate in, if they would like to attend holiday plays or concerts or listen to special music or holiday programs. Not only does this give clients the opportunity to revive fond memories, but it will give caregivers ideas to help recreate some holiday magic for their clients.

Holiday Merrymaking

With so many upbeat activities to do, planning care around the holidays is a treat for caregivers and care recipients! Whether clients do or do not have family members in the area to celebrate with, ask if they would like to participate in some of the following activities:

- **Holiday scrapbooking:** Caregivers can sort through holiday photos with clients and help them create a fun, festive, holiday-themed scrapbook.
- **Card making and picking up a pen:** This is the time of year to get back in touch with family and old friends. Helping clients craft holiday-themed cards, or even just helping them write some correspondence, will start to get them in the spirit.

- **Cooking favorite recipes:** There is nothing more soothing than comfort food and the smells coming from a warm and bustling kitchen. Together, find family recipes, gather the ingredients, and let the senior help as much as possible — just peeling fruit or measuring sugar is helping! And since time should not be a problem, there is no rush and the time spent cooking together can be a great activity.

- **Religious functions:** Oftentimes, people enjoy spending the holidays with members of their church or synagogue. Transporting clients to and from religious holiday functions can help them stay involved and feel part of the festivities, or agencies can arrange for someone from the client's church or synagogue to make a home visit.

- **Parade of lights:** It's fun to see the town dressed up for the holidays. Since many in-home care clients are unable to drive themselves, take them on a tour around town to see decorations and holiday lights at night. What a fun way to spend an evening and allow them to get out of the house!

These are just a few of the many ideas to make the activities fun and upbeat. This is the time of year for caregivers to step outside their comfort zones and make the client's holiday season a positive one. Whether singing some carols, playing Santa, or spinning a dreidel, caregivers can think outside the regular ribbon-wrapped box!

Respite to the Rescue

For family caregivers, the holidays are often more stressful than joyful. Time is stretched even thinner and nerves become frazzled. Since respite care is an area at which home care agencies already excel, they can easily help families take a break while also spreading holiday cheer. These respite services provide some much-needed assistance for family caregivers during this busy time:

- **Companionship:** Large crowds can be overwhelming, particularly for frail, elderly individuals, so family caregivers may not feel comfortable taking their loved ones to parties, busy shopping malls, and other holiday events. Respite care allows family members to enjoy their holiday obligations without sacrificing care and companionship for their relative.
- **Transportation:** With all of the errand running that comes along with preparing for the holidays, it's rare for anyone to find a break. Caregivers can take clients shopping, to doctors' appointments or religious functions so that family members can complete their errands and take a much-needed breather.

- **Meal preparation:** Preparing a big holiday meal for an extended family is already a lofty goal. Adding in the special meal requirements of an elderly or ill loved one can be downright overwhelming. Agencies can help maintain mealtime sanity by preparing dishes that meet the clients' special needs.

Fight Seasonal Depression

While many people of all ages delight in the merry commotion of this time of year, the holidays can be difficult, even depressing, for those without family close by, for those who have lost loved ones who used to be such a valuable part of holiday celebrations, and for those affected by seasonal depression. According to MayoClinic.com, some signs of seasonal affective disorder (SAD) to watch out for include:

- Hopelessness
- Anxiety
- Loss of energy
- Heavy feeling in the limbs
- Social withdrawal
- Oversleeping
- Loss of interest in activities that were once enjoyed
- Appetite changes
- Weight gain
- Difficulty concentrating

Agencies should keep track of changes in clients during this time of year and report possible signs of depression to assigned physicians. The most wonderful time of the year is also the perfect time of year for agencies to reevaluate the emotional and companionship needs of their clients. Because the holidays are about giving to others, agencies can give more of their time and service to those clients who might be without this season; it may be the best present given this year.

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