

HEALTH

Home Health Care Challenges

Demand for workers soars but pay is low

(AP) — For the past three years, Taura Tate's mornings have revolved around caring for a woman who suffers from the effects of a stroke and diabetes. She cooks her oatmeal for breakfast, helps with showers and makes sure she takes the right medicine.

Without the help of a home health aide, the woman, who's in her 70s, would be in a nursing home instead of living on her own.

But Tate has her own struggles. Until a recent promotion, her pay amounted to what she could make at McDonald's. She doesn't get health or retirement benefits and has worked at five agencies, some simultaneously, to guarantee she'll have enough clients.

Demand for home health care workers is soaring as baby boomers — the 78 million Americans born between 1946 and 1964 — get older and states try to save money by moving people out of more costly nursing homes. But filling more than 1 million new home care positions over the next decade will be a challenge.

Most home health aides are paid about the same as maids and manicurists and don't get sick days or health insurance themselves. Many who are self-employed must pay for

Sreenings to Prevent Blindness

The Oregon Lions Club Sight and Hearing Foundation is working to combat preventative blindness and deafness in the community.

Many community members lacking primary care are unaware they have health conditions that threaten their sight, jobs, quality of life and potentially their lives.

The foundation is sponsoring free health screenings this summer with tests for visual acuity, hearing, blood pressure, diabetes (with a 3 hour fast) and glaucoma.

Many of the screenings have already been held in the Portland area, but there are still two upcoming opportunities in which you can participate:

Aug. 18 -- Asian Health and Service Center, 3430 S.E. Powell Blvd. 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Vision and hearing screenings only.)

Aug. 25 -- St. John's Health Fair, Kenton Park, 8417 N Brandon Ave., 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

For additional information, visit olshf.org

their own gas for driving to appointments and cover their own medical bills if they're hurt on the job.

The U.S. Labor Department projects that home health and personal care aides will be among the fastest-growing jobs over the next decade, adding 1.3 million positions and increasing at a rate higher than any other occupation. If those jobs can't be filled, many older Americans are likely to face living with relatives or in nursing homes, which will only cost families and taxpayers more money.

Some aides say they have no choice but to say no when people call looking for help because they can't afford to take on someone else.

Nearly half of all home care workers live at or below the poverty level, and many receive government benefits such as food stamps, unions and advocacy groups say. The median



Taura Tate (left), a home care aide since 1999, folds laundry for Crell Johnson, 76, at Johnson's apartment, in Euclid, Ohio. Tate cooks Johnson's oatmeal for breakfast, helps her shower and watches to make sure she takes the right medicine. (AP photo)

pay a year ago was \$9.70 per hour — 4 cents less than fast-food workers and short-order cooks, ac-

ording to the most recent statistics from the Labor Department.

Agencies that supply home health

workers blame states and the federal government for failing to increase reimbursement rates for Medicaid and Medicare patients at a time when costs are going up.

Home health services are an easy target for cuts because they're not required by federal law, and legislators in states with big deficits say they have no choice but to cut Medicaid spending, the second-costliest item for states behind education.

At the same time, some states, including Ohio, are changing how they coordinate medical care and trying to move some of the most expensive and hard-to-treat patients into home and community-based settings instead of nursing homes.

The result, home care agencies say, is that there's little room for them to make a profit. And that means they can go only so far to attract new workers.

NEW SEASONS MARKET

RIPE HERE, RIPE NOW!

EASY & FUN TO SHOP • SENSIBLY PRICED • LOCALLY OWNED & OPERATED

ARBOR LODGE • 503.467.4777
Interstate Ave & Portland Blvd

CONCORDIA • 503.288.3838
NE 33rd & Killingsworth

Sign up for our weekly e-newsletter at NewSeasonsMarket.com • Connect with us