

Market expanding for geriatric services

By Davis Bushnell
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Rose Kemeny, 89, of Westford broke her hip two years ago. Her disabling injury coincided, however, with the start-up of a private geriatric management program offered by Burlington-based Minuteman Senior Services.

Kemeny soon began receiving a variety of services she could not perform herself arranged by Minuteman that have enabled her to remain in her own home and out of a nursing home. The services range from shopping and transportation to coordinating doctor and dentist appointments.

The help "means more to me than the medicine because I'm able to function," Kemeny said.

Minuteman's geriatric care managers and their counterparts in Greater Boston are a relatively new breed, offering a long menu of services to older people who can afford hourly fees of up to \$150. (Meantime, the state is decreasing funding for similar services for elders with low incomes.)

With baby boomers nearing retirement, many more people are expected to set up consulting practices in this field, which used to be limited to advice on medical matters, geriatric care specialists say.

"Baby boomers are used to dealing with consultants in business, so they'll be comfortable looking for help with many things after they retire," said Joan Butler, executive director of Minuteman Senior Services, which charges \$90 an hour for its private management program services. In the last two years, the nonprofit

group, serving 16 communities west and northwest of Boston, has had more than 50 regular clients like Kemeny, Butler said.

"Demand is increasing for helping elders and their families through a transition, whether it's housing, health care, or legal matters," said Emily B. Saltz, a clinical social worker and founder of Elder Resources of Boston and Newton.

Saltz, who said she is a part of "a growing entrepreneurial movement" in geriatric care management, added she charges from \$100 to \$150 an hour, depending on the services provided.

But there are barriers to this emerging field being widely accepted, noted Andrea Cohen, chief executive and principal of Solomont-Bailis Ventures of Newton and Danvers.

"People often think that insurance pays for everything," so there can be

"sticker shock" over private fees, Cohen said, adding that some elders also are wary of strangers coming to their homes.

The Solomont-Bailis program is one of the largest of its kind in the Boston area, serving some 3,000 elderly clients in a year, Cohen said. "We offer a mix of health care and support services and, unlike some other groups, we employ our own service people." Hourly fees run from \$20 for house care, \$30 for personal shopping,

\$55 for a nurse, to \$85 for a care-planning analysis.

"We do anything that anyone needs to stay in his or her home," said Cohen.

That's also the strategy of Sound Advice, a nonprofit organization that is part of the Elder Care Charitable Foundation of Boston, said Michael Allen, director of development.

Some elders are confused, he said, over the array of services that are being touted by the government and private sector alike. Allen said his group offers a comprehensive initial assessment of an elder's needs for a one-time fee of \$350. After that, an hourly fee of \$100 is charged, he said, noting that when necessary, clients are referred to other specialists such as financial planners and lawyers.

In Westford, Rose Kemeny's care and activities are supervised by Joanne Chaulk, a registered nurse and private-care manager for Minuteman Senior Services.

"[Chaulk] visits me every two weeks. She's like oxygen to me," Kemeny said.

Kemeny's stepson, John, who lives with Kemeny, said, "Thanks to [Chaulk], my stepmother has gotten back some of her independence."

He also figures, he said, that money "has been saved because services provided by Minuteman are reliable. We don't have to hunt for, and then experiment with, other service providers. That can be costly."

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