

# AGING TODAY

Vol. XXVII, No. 4

PAGE 2

July–August 2006

ISSN: 1043-1284

[www.agingtoday.org](http://www.agingtoday.org)

## STUDY FINDS HOMECARE FALLS SHORT

Current homecare policies fall dramatically short of family needs, according to a first-of-its-kind study by researchers at the United Hospital Fund of New York. “This study demonstrates the gap between the needs of caregivers of patients with chronic conditions and the services that are provided under a system based on short-term, acute care rehabilitation,” said Carol Levine, lead researcher of the study and director of the fund’s Families and Health Care Project.

The study focused on 99 New York City family caregivers taking care of stroke or brain injury patients following their discharge from a hospital or short-term nursing home stay. The caregivers were examined starting from their initial experiences with formal homecare services, continuing through the termination of services, as well as about nine months thereafter. Levine and her colleagues determined that unpaid family caregivers—almost three-quarters of whom were women, with a mean age of 57—provide substantial amounts of care but receive inadequate support from healthcare providers.

### LITTLE INFORMATION

Typically, the research team found, family caregivers reported not understanding how the level of homecare services was determined, who was paying for what, which agencies supplied different kinds of workers, and what they should expect from each.

Nearly 40% of caregivers told Levine and her coauthors that they learned about the termination of formal homecare services only when a therapist, nurse or homecare aide informed them. “The physical therapist gave notice on Thursday that Friday was going to be the last visit,” was a frequent comment. Commonly, no discharge plan was provided for patients needing continuing care.

Further, the study found that social workers were little used, being brought in mainly to deal with a problem in closing a case. And speech therapy was seldom provided, even though stroke patients often have difficulty recovering language skills.

Stroke patients discharged from hospitals, typically a week after the incident, require an enormous amount of care at home, the authors noted. Although most are eligible for some homecare services, caregivers shoulder three-quarters of the care responsibilities even when agency services are being delivered. Study participants rendered an average of 32 hours of care per week while receiving 11 hours of homecare aid from an agency.

Usually, homecare services last only six or seven weeks. “Between one-third and one-half of family caregivers reported being inadequately prepared for agency homecare services to end. At all stages, family caregivers experienced significant isolation, anxiety and depression,” the researchers reported.

The study, titled “‘This Case Is Closed’: Family Caregivers and the Termination of Home Health Care Services for Stroke Patients,” appeared in *The Milbank Quarterly* (June 2006), and is available online at [www.uhfnyc.org/usr\\_doc/Milbank.pdf](http://www.uhfnyc.org/usr_doc/Milbank.pdf). For information about other articles published on the study, visit [www.uhfnyc.org/pubs-stories3220/pubs-stories\\_list.htm?attrib\\_id=13709](http://www.uhfnyc.org/pubs-stories3220/pubs-stories_list.htm?attrib_id=13709). ❖