

PACE

program assists with care, transportation



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By Melissa Erickson
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For Norm and Mary Jo Zarella of Lowell, MassPACE is a lifeline. “We would be lost without it,” Norm said. Mary Jo, who has been diagnosed with dementia, receives comprehensive care from doctor visits to day care while Norm continues to work, and even has caregiver support at home.

Monday through Friday an aide arrives at 6:30 a.m. to help Mary Jo with daily tasks as Norm readies for work. At 8:30 a.m. she gets a ride to Fallon Health’s Summit ElderCare program in Lowell where she spends her day socializing, eating meals and doing recreational activities until early afternoon, when she gets transportation home. Another aide meets her there to accompany her until Norm returns from work.

What the Program of

All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly, or PACE, offers seems too good to be true: coordinating and providing all needed preventive, primary, acute and long-term care services so older individuals can continue living in the community.

“It’s so unique. Individuals who qualify are eligible for a nursing home level of care but are able to remain in the home setting of their choice with care,” said Candace Kuebel, executive director of MassPACE.

The program develops a customized health care plan with a specialized team, which may include a primary care provider, a nurse, a social worker, a physical therapist, a dietitian and other specialists.

The care team also includes transportation coordinators and providers, home health aides and mental health support. Services run the gamut from prescription drug coverage and X-rays to dentistry

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and occupational therapy.

While PACE is the doctor, it’s also the insurer, Kuebel said.

“PACE handles 100% of the insurance plus medical, behavioral, therapeutic. It’s all-inclusive care and as a result a person remains healthier and in their own home,” she said.

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Another perk of PACE is that the caregiver also receives support, whether it’s the son or the daughter, the husband or wife.

“Caregiver stress is the No. 1 reason for people to go into a nursing home. That’s

not necessary,” Kuebel said.

Norm Zarella attends a monthly support group and is paired up with a “support buddy” whom he relies on, he said.

For three-year MassPACE participant Bill Langlois, the program literally got him back on his feet.

“I couldn’t walk. PACE got me physical therapy, and now I can walk. My next project is weight management,” said Langlois, who attends Element Care’s PACE Center in Lowell, where he is fond of playing bingo every day.

“It’s one stop for all my medical needs. Everything you need is there. I like going. I enjoy it. The services are great, and the people are nice. I’m gung ho about getting others to join. I’ve brought in about 15 or 16 other people,” Langlois said.

To find PACE in your community, visit npaonline.org/pace-you/pacefinder-find-pace-program-your-neighborhood.