

Elder Care: Living Independently Thanks to Coordinated, Compassionate Care

By Linda Barlow

Vera Brown of Churchville, Pa., was like many elderly Americans. She had multiple health issues including decreased mobility, degenerative joint disease, progressive dementia and aphasia from a stroke. But unlike some in her situation, she was able to live comfortably in her own home until her death in October, thanks to [LIFE St. Mary](#). LIFE is a Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly ([PACE®](#)), a unique model of care that helps people live safely at home with assistance from a team of compassionate healthcare experts.

Elder care can be expensive and frustrating. Nursing homes and other long-term care facilities can quickly eat up a person's life savings as well as destroy their [feelings of independence](#). But keeping the elder at home means family members or other caregivers need to drive to multiple doctor appointments, stay informed about medical issues, keep track of medications, and more—not to mention the worry that goes along with leaving their loved one at home during the day. E

LIFE St. Mary offers 24/7 support and a range of services for elders and their caregivers: medical and in-home care; medications; transportation; physical, speech and occupational therapy; social work services; nutritional counseling and home-delivered meals; hearing, foot and dental care; adult day care; and caregiver respite. The hub of the program is the [LIFE Center](#), a central location where doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals offer treatment and monitor changes in participants' health. Here, participants also receive nutritious meals and join in on a variety of activities to keep active and make new friends.

“[St. Mary Medical Center](#) started LIFE five years ago to address the needs of the growing population of older adults in the Bucks County, Pa. area,” explains Erin Williams, manager, Outreach & Enrollment, LIFE. “The program is part of St. Mary's commitment to improving the quality of life for everyone in our community, including elderly residents who need assistance to remain independent in their own homes.”

For Vera Brown, that assistance arrived at her front door three days a week, in the form of a LIFE van, which picked her up and took her to the LIFE Center. There, she received meals, therapeutic recreation, routine physical therapy and a full range of medical services. Vera's LIFE team—her doctor, nurse, social worker, physical therapist, and home care nurse—collaborate to ensure that the care provided met her needs, and regularly updated her daughter to discuss her mother's care plans. All of Vera's medications came directly to the LIFE Center and were sent home with her. This saved

her daughter the time of making trips or phone calls to the pharmacy, or coordinating doctor's visits.

In addition to reducing headaches and hassles for family caregivers, LIFE helps to manage healthcare utilization and costs.

“The program costs about 30 percent less than nursing home care in Pennsylvania,” says Williams. “Program participants pay one monthly fee that covers all services, no matter how many of those services they use or how often. There are no copays or deductibles—even for medical equipment, prescriptions and transportation—so participants know exactly what their healthcare costs will be every month, with no surprises.”

Ms. Williams notes that LIFE's coordinated care model is also helping St. Mary Medical Center reduce costs relating to unnecessary hospital and nursing home stays, medication errors, redundant tests and unnecessary labs. She says by reducing unnecessary hospital stays, “we're saving a lot of healthcare dollars.”

“Holistic, patient-centered care can be difficult when elderly people stay in their home,” concludes Williams. “But with LIFE St. Mary, all care—including specialist care—is centrally coordinated, making it much easier for patients to access the care they need. Plus, we see our participants on a regular basis, so we can tailor services to each patient's medical, psychological and social needs.”

“LIFE St. Mary is a wonderful program and a Godsend to aging and disabled individuals and their families,” says Marie Brown-Etris, daughter of Vera Brown. “For my mom, it was like they were an extended family who treated her with nothing but kindness through smiles, touches, hugs and kind words. The compassion and understanding for the people they serve is palpable.”

Are you a caregiver for an elderly family member or friend? Have you been able to take advantage of a PACE program like LIFE St. Mary? Tell us about your situation in the Comments.

To read this on the RWHC Blog, [click here](#).