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Joe Steckler



Assistance for Family Caregivers of Veterans

by Joe Steckler, President of Helping Seniors of Brevard

As a veteran myself, it gives me great pleasure to make you aware of a program not often discussed, one that can support caregivers of veterans. It is called the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers, and you can get more information than I will discuss here by calling the Veterans Administration team in Viera at 321-633-2012 or by going to www.va.gov/family-member-benefits/comprehensive-assistance-for-family-caregivers/.

This program is not Veterans Aid & Attendance. It is not paid to the veteran, but to the spouse or family member who assists the veteran with activities of daily living (ADLs). The program has some definitive requirements, but it is possible to make changes to your current eligibility status to qualify for the funding, which ranges from \$1,800 a month to \$3,000 a month. The periods for eligibility are for veterans with 70% disability serving before 1975 or after 2001.

Consider for a moment a veteran who retires at 20% disability but subsequently develops Alzheimer's disease and needs constant care. Since Alzheimer's is a qualifying disease, it would be possible to reclassify his disability and make him eligible for payment. Generally speaking, ADLs are those acts which the veteran must perform but cannot do so without the help of another person. These would include toileting, showering, dressing, getting to a doctor, dressing, fixing meals, etc.

One might look at the 70% disability requirement and say, "I could never qualify." However, we must remember that our bodies and abilities change, and it is possible to reclassify a veteran's disability status. In my own work with veterans over the years, I am amazed at the higher disability numbers that we encounter. Other conditions that qualify for payment include Parkinson's, stroke, and other debilitating diseases that require special help for the individual.

It has taken me a number of years to become as knowledgeable as I am about the Veteran's Caregiver Assistance program. I am also learning that there are many other programs that are offered by the Veterans Administration about which I know little. One of these is the General Caregiver Support Program, which can open doors to many other programs, such as respite, education, and other services designed to assist the veteran and his or her family.

There is help available for the 75,000 veterans in Brevard County. Our VA clinic, located in Viera, is one of the top clinics in the state, and people drive from all over Florida to use it. The audiology department is excellent, and service is top notch. I once gave a brief at the County Health and Human Services Department, experienced a severe headache, went to the VA clinic, and was treated like a dignitary.

VA facilities vary in how services are delivered, but ours is an example of one of the better ones. Call them at 321-633-2012 to find help or visit them at 2900 Veterans Way, Viera, Florida.

Contact Helping Seniors at 321-473-7770, at www.HelpingSeniorsofBrevard.org, or at P.O. Box 372936, Satellite Beach, FL 32937.

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