

Everyone's safety is our goal

By Shaun Meyer

Director of Home Health Services

Serving on the Nebraska Home Health Board of Directors for 11 years now, I have made many friends across the United States. It does my heart good to know the good being done by folks in home care in areas of high need and disaster.

As you know the EastCoast is facing some huge storms, and the homebound folks become of high concern. I am sharing this article written by the state executive from Connecticut Home Care.

'With thousands of clients scattered throughout the state, home health care agencies began preparations last week to ensure that seniors and people with disabilities would get the services they needed during the storm.

For Margaret DeVito and Heather Marques, who work at VNA HealthCare in Glastonbury, that included making backup plans for a client with intellectual disabilities who uses a battery-powered LifeVest defibrillator device. They worked to secure a backup battery for the LifeVest, which he might have had trouble recharging if he lost power, and, after his car battery died on Saturday, they arranged for transportation in case he needed to go to the Vernon shelter, said Terry Foley, the agency's communications coordinator.

The hospice care company identified patients' needs for medication, supplies and staffing, and backup for those who rely on electricity for oxygen, tube feedings, suction, ventilation or other treatments.

The agency's medical equipment supplier, J+L Medical Services, managed to get oxygen and other backup equipment to clients without generators before the governor closed state highways Monday.

The staff also tracked the storm to see which patients might need to be relocated, identified who could be visited Sunday and Monday, and created a disaster zone map with staff members' residences so they could be mobilized quickly.

The challenges of continuing to meet the needs of the thousands of people who rely on home health care became clear during last year's October snowstorm and power outages, when some home health workers struggled to get to their clients because closed gas stations left them without enough fuel. In other cases, home care patients ended up in hospitals or nursing homes because some shelters wouldn't take people who used oxygen or were incontinent.

"Our home health workers are creative and resourceful in crisis situations, often thinking of their clients' needs before their own," said Deborah Hoyt, president and CEO of the Connecticut Association of Home Care and Hospice.

"Many workers had no power in their own homes but traveled through rough weather conditions yesterday and this morning to ensure their clients were safe, had food and received their scheduled medications or treatment in their home or in shelters."

In Nebraska, we face some pretty good storms, and I would ask that if you know of folks close by you who would not fair so well without power, due to oxygen use or other conditions, please have a plan for helping out.

It is up to all of us to take care of those around us who are unable to care for themselves.

Prayers for a safe winter Holiday~ Shaun