In celebration of International Nurses day on May 12th, KABC had the honor of speaking with Nurse Jennifer, BSN, who puts her life on the line each day of the pandemic to help older Kansans.

Jennifer’s passion to be a nurse and work with older adults began just out of high school when her step-mom landed her a job as a receptionist at the local nursing facility. From there, Jennifer fell in love with the residents and staff and quickly became a Certified Nursing Assistant in 1991. Jennifer has continued her education over the years (including her current studies as a psychiatric nurse practitioner). She now serves as the Assistant Director of Nursing and the Infection Prevention Control Officer at a Kansas nursing facility.

As the infection control specialist for her nursing facility, Jennifer had a lot on her plate as the nation watched the pandemic approaching. “Fear of the unknown was terrifying. I would track outbreaks in other facilities daily on the KDHE website, and it felt like we were waiting for the inevitable.”

When the federal government called for complete lockdowns of long-term care facilities, Jennifer knew her residents needed more. “It is heart-wrenching! These years are supposed to be their golden years, the best years of their life. They have already been placed in a nursing facility and are now isolated from their friends and families. The lockdown was detrimental to the residents as they could not even visit with their peers. Due to the restrictions, we had to find new ways to foster the sense of community our nursing facility has always had, like bringing iPads to rooms to talk to other residents in the building.”

Throughout the pandemic, Jennifer has been responsible for ensuring that her nursing facility complies with regulations set by four government entities, which can update their policies as frequently as daily. “You just have to keep going and make sure you are following everything because it is your patient’s life on the line.” Jennifer lost her parents before COVID and saw her residents as surrogates, which kept her motivated in those long nights of research and updated daily policy changes. “We did lose some residents, and some of them were my very favorite people. However, you fight, and you do everything you can so that they can have every bit of time with their family possible and have a good quality of life at the end.”

When vaccines finally became available for staff and residents, Jennifer acted quickly to bring everyone up to speed. She personally felt empowered by the vaccine because she “was making the right decision for my patients and me.” She made sure her staff and residents had access to all the vaccine information she could find. She continues to hold regular briefings with staff, residents, and families to talk about the latest vaccine information and create trust through transparency. Jennifer has learned a lot from the pandemic and believes it has permanently impacted care. “I do not
We rarely saw this kind of infectious disease before and were completely unprepared with PPE initially. However, by remaining hyper-vigilant, moving forward with infection control policies for staff, visitors and volunteers we can improve our residents’ overall health. During the pandemic, we were not only able to stay COVID free for eight months but also saw a drop in more common illnesses like colds and respiratory infections.

In celebration of International Nurses Day, Jennifer wants to remind her fellow nurses to “Continue to have faith, let your light shine bright, and fight the good fight because what we do matters!”

KABC thanks Jennifer and all of the incredible nurses who put their lives on the line every day of the pandemic to care for the older adults with whom we advocate.

Advocacy In Action

Since we last reported, Governor Kelly line-item vetoed the 300% protected income level (PIL) increase for Kansans receiving PACE benefits (we are told this would have benefitted approximately 40 persons) because it was too narrowly applied. This week’s wrap-up session is now this year’s last chance for legislators to increase the PIL to 300% for ALL HCBS recipients (see the sidebar “Kansans Deserve to Age at Home”) thus allowing them to keep more of THEIR money in THEIR pockets to help them stay at home with supports and services and out of institutional care which they mostly prefer. If you are in support of this much-needed increase, contact your legislator – especially who are on these committees – to let them know.

Also there is still time in this wrap up session for the legislature to expand Medicaid a/b/a KanCare which will benefit Kansans by providing more health care to those who need it, and bringing more health care dollars to Kansas. To date 39 states and the District of Columbia have approved Medicaid Expansion.

Resources

May is Older Americans Month, and many older Americans say they would prefer to receive care at home or in the community rather than in a nursing facility. Medicaid covers some home and community-based services (HCBS), and our partners at Justice in Aging made this great primer to provide an overview of Medicaid HCBS, the institutional bias, and how states are doing in terms of serving older adults with disabilities in the community.

KABC also offers a booklet "The Care You Want" in print and online, to help Kansans obtain quality in-home care. Call or email if you’d like a copy sent to you.

May is also National High Blood Pressure Education Month. Did you know that low sodium diets can help control high blood pressure? Following a low-salt diet helps keep blood pressure and swelling under control. It can also make breathing easier if you have heart failure. Check out KABC’s low sodium/heart healthy diet-friendly recipes in our Health & Nutrition For Every Step Of Life recipe book.

COVID-19 Resources

Ombudsmen to Resume In-Person Visits

Due to health and safety concerns related to COVID-19 for residents, facility staff, and ombudsmen, the Kansas Long Term Care Ombudsman Program suspended in-person visits to residents in March 2020. We are happy to announce Regional Ombudsman will resume conducting in-person visits the week of April 26th. Read more details here.

could make ends meet. But until then, I don’t know how I’ll come up with the money.

It’s only a matter of time until I’ll have no other choice than to move into a nursing home...

You Can Help!

Your gift underwrites KABC’s advocacy efforts to increase the amount of income protection for those receiving in-home care with Medicaid

Support KABC At No Cost!

Dillons/Kroger

Before you shop at Dillons be sure to designate KABC as your Community Rewards Charity to improve elder care as you shop. Click the photo to sign up and designate KABC as your charity of choice!

Amazon Smile

Amazon donates a percentage of each item purchased through their website to a charity of your choice. Before you click that “Buy Now” button, designate KABC as your Amazon Smile charity and better elder care with every purchase!

Don’t Forget The App!

Amazon recently added the Smile charity feature to their mobile app too! Here’s how to activate it on your phone:

1. Open the Amazon app on your phone
2. Select the main menu (=) & tap on “AmazonSmile” within Programs & Features
3. Select "Kansas Advocates For Better Care" as your charity
4. Follow the on-screen instructions to activate AmazonSmile in the mobile app

Your donations help strengthen our advocacy work to assure aging adults and Kansans with disabilities always have quality long-term care.

Thank you!
Visitation Changes

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released new guidance that lifts restrictions on dining and other activities for fully vaccinated nursing home residents on April 27th. The new guidance allows fully vaccinated nursing home residents to resume dining activities without masking or social distancing restrictions. It also permits visitations and personal contact among residents and visitors who are fully vaccinated. If visitors and residents are both fully vaccinated, they can visit without masks and without social distancing as long as they are alone in their room or in a visitation room without unvaccinated individuals.

Our partners at National Center on Law & Elder Rights have updated their Frequently Asked Questions: LTSS Visitation Rights & COVID-19 to include information on the most recent guidance from Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services on visitation rights of nursing facility residents.

Vaccine Information

Use of the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine is allowed again now that a panel of experts has voted to put it back in distribution despite rare blood clotting problems. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) decided to restart administering the single-dose vaccine and recommends that anyone with concerns should consult their health care provider. The April 25th CDC update quotes "A review of all available data at this time shows that the J&J/Janssen COVID-19 Vaccine’s known and potential benefits outweigh its known and potential risks. However, women younger than 50 years old should be aware of the rare but increased risk of this adverse event and that there are other COVID-19 vaccine options available for which this risk has not been seen."

About Kansas Advocates for Better Care

KABC is a charitable 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose mission is to improve long-term care for older adults in Kansas. Our mission is achieved through public policy advocacy, trainings and education, and by providing guidance & support to older adults and their families who need help with long-term care issues.

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