

Finding the 'perfect companion' for caregiving needs

BY MARJORIE RICE

When a family member is elderly or ill and needs in-home care, finding help can be a frustrating and exhausting experience.

Wendy Stoeckel is a case in point.

Her mother, who lives in Northern Arizona, is undergoing treatment for cancer, staying with Stoeckel when she comes to the Valley for medical treatment. Stoeckel needed home care for her mom while she was away at work.

"I interviewed a couple of large companies that provided caregiving," Stoeckel said. "I didn't feel they were a good fit. I was looking for a more personal touch and a compassionate person who really does care."

She finally found it in Jon Siegel and his company, The Perfect Companion.

"One of the hospice companies I contacted recommended Jon," Stoeckel said. "I got a great feeling from him."

"Our whole business is based on trust and a personalized approach," said Siegel, a clinical psychotherapist for more than 30 years and a certified Medicare provider since 1991, specializing in the field of adult/geriatric psychotherapy. Siegel founded The Perfect Companion in 2008 and began serving clients mainly in Phoenix, Carefree and Scottsdale/Fountain Hills. He is expanding to serve the Chandler/Sun Lakes area.

Many companies offering care services are franchises, Siegel said.

"We're different in that we're clinically based. We're one of the few care providers that I know of who can say that. By clinically based, I mean we have somebody who is a professional in the field who knows what the medical and psychosocial issues are and who takes a holistic approach to helping the client.

"Being a social worker/psychologist who specializes in the geriatric field—and one who makes house calls—really sets me apart."

Siegel begins each client relationship with an in-depth assessment of the patient, including family dynamics.

"I meet every one of our clients and talk them to one-to-one," he said. "All of our care is individualized. How can you send out a caregiver without meeting the client personally first and finding out about their individual needs?"

"If it's appropriate for us to be involved, we will be involved. However, we're also an information resource. I have a very large number of contacts and can refer someone to placement services, social workers and other people who also can help. I help many people in that way, and I do it without charge."

Siegel's clinical assessment includes more than medical and psychological issues. "I also look at the house and give the clients information about steps they can take to prevent problems," he said. Those steps include

removing throw rugs, which can be trip and fall hazards, and installing grab bars in the bathroom and shower.

Once he has an understanding of the client's current and potential needs, Siegel works with the family to develop a plan of care and services. Those cover a broad spectrum, from companionship, meal-preparation and shopping to hygiene support,

medication reminders, bathing, help with dressing and other personal care issues. Medical assistance can include monitoring vital signs, catheter and wound care, rehabilitative therapy and other services.

"When you're dealing with the elderly it's really important to know what their problems are going to be, in addition to what may be occurring at



Jon Siegel, shown here with director of business development Mark Lewis, years to provide care services via "The Perfect Companion." STSN photo by Tim Sealy

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present," Siegel said. "We want to take a preventive approach."

Another service Siegel provides is recommending assisted living and care homes for clients who need that level of care. "I visit these homes often, and I know which ones are good," he said. As the level of care increases for our clients and they need to go into a more structured environment, I can refer them to very good situations. That can eliminate long hours of shopping around that many family members undertake. Instead, I can take them to four or five homes that I know will be a good fit."

Siegel's interest in geriatrics stretches back to his days in graduate school. "It was in the 1970s and I was the only one in my group who took an internship in a nursing home," he said. "People asked me why. I answered that when we get older all of us are going to need someone who can help us with the process of aging."

Siegel started The Perfect Companion after talking to medical professionals in Scottsdale and Fountain Hills who suggested he set up a non-medical in-home care company because they were having trouble finding caregivers whom their patients liked. "I thought I could develop a company with a concierge-boutique approach," he said. "Our approach is working—we've grown 100 percent each year over the last five years."

His medical contacts also helped Siegel's new business by recommending

candidates for his caregiving staff. Currently, the company has 35 full-time caregivers and a varying number of part-time employees who fill in as needed.

Siegel's expansion plan will include modules with approximately 20 to 25 clients each, managed by an individual with a medical background. "I think the Chandler/Sun Lakes area is ripe to grow," he said.

Finding the right caregivers will be key to his company's successful expansion, Siegel said. "My whole goal is to match up the individual skill sets and the personalities of our caregivers with the individual needs and personalities of our clients. Wherever possible, we have the same caregiver go to the client each time."

Caregivers currently are independent contractors. "I'm thinking as our core group grows, we'll consider what we can do to make a change in that model," Siegel said.

The Perfect Companion is seeking caregivers for the Chandler-Sun Lakes area, said Mark Lewis, director of business development for the company. For information, call (602) 300-5018.

In addition to the expansion plans, Siegel and Lewis are working on a program to improve in-home care and prevent re-occurring emergency room admissions and hospitalizations.

The program deals with issues such as fall prevention, identification and recognition of urinary tract infections

and TIA (Transient Ischemic Attack, also known as mini strokes). "You can have up to 300 of those strokes per year and you don't even know you've had them," Siegel said. "As a result your memory could be short-term or depleted. TIAs also can affect falls."

The program is called EIPPO (Education Intervention Prevention = Preferred Outcome). EIPPO encompasses fall prevention, and checking for medication issues. It also includes care for issues resulting from Alzheimer's disease and dementia, and development of a plan of care to help clients plan for and manage future issues.

While he's excited about EIPPO and his company's expansion plans, Siegel's first focus is on his clients, and he keeps close contact with each one.

"I meet with my clients on a weekly basis," he said.

Clients like Stoeckel appreciate that personal touch.

Her mother's treatment schedule varies—sometimes one or two days a week, sometimes a whole week, Stoeckel said. "Despite that, we've had the same person come most of the times. Perfect Companion has been good at accommodating our needs. It gives me peace of mind knowing that mom's safe. It's a godsend to not have to worry that she's alone, that she's being taken care of."



The Perfection Companion specializes in finding compassionate caregivers.

Stoeckel said she particularly appreciates Siegel's hands-on approach. "He follows up and will give me a call to ask how things are doing. He checks up on me, too, not just my mom. That's so helpful because the family caregiver kind of gets lost in the shuffle. Joann Stewart, a second-generation patient, agreed. "Jon is very patient and kind and is a good listener. He took care of my mom, and then this year when I had surgery he took care of me. I really appreciate Jon's guidance. I have such confidence in knowing that he's there for my mom and me."

The Perfect Companion Inc. can be reached at (602) 300-5018. For more information, visit www.azperfectcompanion.com.

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