

Shelley Joseph-Kordell Remarks

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Thursday, October 28, 2010

Shelley Joseph Kordell Award and Scholarship Ceremony – Honoring Those who Work with Seniors

What an honor to be here with you this afternoon. Though I didn't know Shelley Joseph-Kordell personally, I certainly knew of her pioneering work -- and it would be hard to imagine a more fitting legacy than this annual opportunity to celebrate her life by honoring those who serve seniors.

When Jennifer Kordell and I were visiting about this year's ceremony, and in particular what remarks I should bring, she shared that this year's planning committee had family caregivers, and in particular, women as caregivers, on their minds. While those of us working in the field have long known the vital role that family caregivers play in meeting the needs of the aging, our society has only recently begun to understand that we must – in the words of Minnesota's Transform 2010 initiative – “*redesign services to wrap around family care*”. *Shelley Joseph-Kordell knew this, and her work in what was then the new field of geriatric care management, foreshadowed the aspirations we have today for initiatives like health care homes, and integrated service delivery – approaches that recognize that the senior who is our client is part of lifetime's network of relatives, friends, neighbors – and that this integration of informal and formal care giving is a key to the successful and joyful aging.*

I can tell you that as a childless boomer about to turn 60 myself, her “Rent A Daughter” business enterprise resonates in a way I could only appreciate once I had experienced family care giving *myself* – and was stunned by a blinding flash of the obvious – that to weave together the combination of services and living arrangements that ensure not only quality of care -- but also quality of *life* -- is all but impossible to do alone.

As service professionals we know what Shelley knew – that family care giving today is both challenged and challenging. Challenged, because families are smaller and available caregivers therefore fewer. Nearly 20% of women in our state are childless - and in

Minnesota we have the unique characteristic of having one of the highest percentages of women in the workforce – in theory, reducing the number of hours available to care for senior family member. I say, in theory, only because we also know that family caregivers go to heroic lengths to fulfill their role – even when it means raising children, while providing care for a parent, while juggling a career.

We also know that families tend to be more geographically dispersed -- about 15% of caregivers in Minnesota are providing care to someone who lives more than an hour away -- and that absenteeism at work related to eldercare has risen to about \$17 billion dollars a year across the US. We know -- and in fact can pinpoint on a map of our state -- the areas where in the next two decades, there simply will not be enough mid-aged women in the local population – the profile of today’s caregiver corps – to maintain older persons at home. Thanks to the Department of Human Services, we can even put a price tag on that troubling demographic prediction – for every 1% drop in family care giving, we can expect to see an additional \$30 million dollars in state Medicaid spending each and every year.

We also are beginning to appreciate the full extent of the toll that care giving can take on the caregiver. The Alzheimer’s Association estimates that as a result of the stress and physical demands of care giving, women who have been caregivers for someone with Alzheimer’s Disease are nearly six times more likely than non-caregivers to end up with the disease themselves! I am among the adult children who look back at the end of my parents’ lives and question whether I should have or could have intervened sooner in the care giving responsibilities my mother assumed for my father. My mother said she would have it no other way than to provide the care needed to keep my father at home -- and while she – and my siblings and I – succeeded in that goal, there is no doubt that the burdens of her care giving led directly to her own admission to a care center a short six months after my father died.

It was a bit of serendipity that I had the opportunity this week to talk with someone who had been a client of Shelley Joseph-Kordell’s. Though her mother – on whose behalf she

had retained Shelley's services – had died 9 years ago, she spoke to me with a sense of wonder at Shelley's "competence, intelligence and compassion" in bringing all of the right services together at the right time to address her mother's increasing dementia and care needs. And in talking about Shelley's work on her behalf she said two things that made me stop and write them down on the spot, for I thought they captured in a profound way the impact those of us in this field hope we can have on the individuals and families we serve. She said that Shelley's work made her mother feel "more in control of what was happening", and, in turn, allowed *her* to "remain a daughter" -- focused on her mother's emotional well-being rather than in her words "getting crash doctorate in social work" to make everything work. She went on to say that these nine years later she can look back "and still draw comfort" from the service options and care setting that Shelley helped her and her mother choose, with the peace of mind of knowing that "*it was all done right.*" What care giving gifts to give a family – the kind of care giving gifts we gather here to honor this afternoon.

Thanks to pioneers like Shelley Joseph-Kordell, the vision of services wrapped around family care has some new and powerful advocates. The Alzheimer's Association study I was quoting earlier is part of a very high profile campaign by Maria Shriver to capture the nation's attention to, and support for, caregivers. And I have to say – I *love* the title of her study and campaign – "*A Women's Nation Takes on Alzheimer's*" – shining a light on the fact that women are overwhelmingly the givers and receivers of much of older adult services.

Closer to home, the Minnesota Leadership Council on Aging – a unique collaboration of advocates, providers and consumers – has selected care giving as its focus for the coming year and has organized a summit for early December to kick off a high-profile policy and public dialogue on ways we can support care giving. The state's Transform 2010 Initiative has called out clear action steps for ways in which we can elevate the profession and practice of care giving – and strengthen and help sustain it for the future.

There is other good news of the care giving front as well – while we still have some gaps in affordability, we do have more service options for seniors than we have ever had before, and more and more, those options are based on maintaining our elders in the place *they* call home -- for as long as possible. In the past two decades, we have reduced the utilization of nursing homes by nearly 40% and even more promising; over 50% of persons who used a care center in Minnesota last year were discharged back to their homes in their community.

We also find ourselves on the cusp of exciting new technologies to help us stay at home longer and more safely, to aid family caregivers in their support for, and monitoring of, their loved ones' needs, technology to increase the effectiveness of care delivery through electronic health records and communications – something that the Shelley Joseph-Kordell would no doubt have used to take her care management services to the next level.

The constant through all of the promise and challenge of the future is the quality of individuals attracted to this field -- as a profession and a passion. We gather here this afternoon to honor three who stand out. The seniors and their families whose lives have been, and will be touched by them, are the better for their commitment and their caring.

In closing, and in celebration of them and the care giving pioneer whose name graces their awards, I would like to share a quote from a book written some years ago by Dr. William Thomas, the physician who has been at the forefront of the movement to reinvent service to seniors. The book is called *Learning from Hannah – Secrets of a Life Worth Living*:

“And Hannah said, elders exist because they teach us how to make a community. When we come together to meet their needs, we learn how to live as human beings. They instruct US in the art of caring. There is no more precious gift than that.”