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Serving the Derry Area

Loaners' Closet at Community Caregivers Office is Newly Organized and Staffed

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NUTFIELD NEWS

Since its inception eight years ago, the loaners' closet at the Community Caregivers of Greater Derry has offered durable medical equipment on a temporary basis to patients all over southern New Hampshire.

Still, the loaners' closet has been underutilized compared to what it could offer the region, mostly because of a lack of staffing and organization.

"It wasn't in our job description, so there really wasn't time for it," said Community Caregivers Executive Director Cindee Alice Tanuma about the loaners' closet.

Now, that has changed. This summer, the Alexander Eastman Foundation provided a grant to staff the loaners' closet for 10 hours per week for 16 months.

Community Caregivers immediately hired Linda Connelly of Londonderry, a former volunteer driver who filled in for Tanuma earlier this year while she was on maternity leave.

"It's great to be able to stay, because I love it here," said Connelly, who has spent the last week organizing the 1,300 items in the loaners' closet.

Approximately 10 items each day are checked into or out of the loaners' closets from patients as far away as the North Country. That is

because physical therapists and doctors' offices recommend patients consider it when they cannot purchase their own medical equipment.

The loaners' closet does not have any invasive medical equipment like needles or tubing, but it does have everyday necessities for many patients recovering from an injury, from surgery, or for elderly people who are simply unsteady on their feet. Such items include wheelchairs, crutches, walkers, medical bandages, bathroom handlebars, braces, blood pressure monitors, pillboxes and even air conditioning units.

Previously, all the items were stacked in no particular order inside a small room near the Community Caregivers office in the Masonic Temple in downtown Derry. Thanks to the Alexander Eastman Foundation grant, Community Caregivers was able to rent out more space and move the loaners' closet to a bigger room in the back of the building.

"It's just so much more easily accessible now," said Connelly. "Before, it was hazardous just going in to get something out."

Some items in the loaners' closet are checked out for just a few days while a patient recovers or takes a trip. Other items have been gone for years. Community Caregivers office coordinator Julie Levesque said that is exactly how the organization would like to see the loaners' closet



The loaners' closet at the Community Caregivers office in Derry has a new space and staff to operate it. The closet is free to use and is filled with durable medical equipment.

Photo by Robin Respaut

operate.

"Everything is free to loan, and there are no time limits," Levesque said. "We have a really nice circle of people who give us items to loan out, too."

Many patients are blindsided by the escalating costs of rehabilitation gear, said Levesque.

"They are clueless. They just come in and say, 'I need these things.' Often times, Medicaid or Medicare doesn't cover them," Levesque said. "We don't want people

to go out and buy them."

Connelly has yet to work out a regular schedule for open hours at the loaners' closet. For now, the schedule is more irregular or by appointment.

Donations are always welcome. Currently, the loaners' closet has waiting lists for shower seats, rollators or rolling walkers, and wheelchairs.

For more information, call the Community Caregivers of Greater Derry at 432-0877.