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Home Health Care for Children with Cerebral Palsy

BAYADA provides help and hope during Cerebral Palsy Awareness Month

MT. LAUREL, NJ – March 4, 2013 - Gabe DaCosta, 10, is happily watching one of his favorite movies, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. For good measure, he also holds the book of the same name on his lap.

"He doesn't just watch movies, he wants to learn everything about them," says Gabe's mom Savine DaCosta, describing her good-natured son. "The best thing of all is that his home health care nurses understand his likes and dislikes, and go the extra mile to make him happy."

Gabe is one of an estimated 764,000 children and adults in the United States who have cerebral palsy. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, cerebral palsy is a group of disorders that can involve brain and nervous system functions, such as movement, learning, hearing, seeing, and thinking.

Cerebral palsy is caused by damage to one or more specific areas of the brain. This usually occurs during pregnancy, childbirth, or early childhood (up to about age three). There are several different types of cerebral palsy, including:

- Spastic: characterized by muscle stiffness and permanent contractions
- Athetoid or dyskinetic: characterized by uncontrolled, slow, writhing movements
- Ataxic: characterized by poor coordination and balance

According to the National Institutes of Health, there is no cure for the developmental brain damage that causes cerebral palsy. However, the goal of treatment is to help the person be as independent as possible. Home health care can be a beneficial part of a team approach to treatment that includes primary care doctors; physician specialists in neurology, pulmonology, and gastroenterology; dentists; social workers; nurses, and occupational therapists, physical therapists, and speech language pathologists.

Specially trained home health care nurses can improve and maintain muscle function and coordination, encourage healthy nutrition, and monitor and treat the physical symptoms that may accompany the disorder.

For Gabe, even though he has the use of his arms and legs, spasticity causes a lack of coordination, making movement difficult. His home health care nurses perform range of motion and strengthening exercises, and help him get around using a special wheelchair. His nurses also monitor his fragile respiratory system and provide care for the feeding tube he relies on to prevent severe reflux and take in the calories he needs to thrive.

"At first I was scared. I didn't think anyone could care for my child better than I could," shared DaCosta. "But I soon realized that the nurses had special training to deal with all sorts of situations, especially when Gabe stopped breathing. They knew exactly what to do."

Nurses from BAYADA Pediatrics undergo special age and diagnosis-specific training to care for children with mild to severe symptoms of the disorder, according to BAYADA Director of Pediatric Clinical Operations Kathy Pfeiffer, BSN, RN.

BAYADA provides the following services for children with cerebral palsy:

- Enteral (tube) feeding and feeding tube care
- Tracheostomy and ventilator care
- Care during and after seizures
- Respiratory care
- Assistance with toileting
- Therapeutic play, range of motion, and strengthening exercises
- Assistance with ambulation, including help with a wheelchair, walker, or other assistive devices
- Assistance with verbalization and communication devices
- One-on-one care at school, including transportation to and from school, and field trips

In addition, Pfeiffer says, the following may help with communication, learning, and mobility:

- Computer devices to enhance language and communication skills
- Glasses
- Hearing aides
- Braces and splints to assist with mobility of extremities
- Walkers and gait trainers
- Wheelchairs

“Gabe’s nurses have taught our family so much,” said DaCosta. “They helped us understand cerebral palsy and get the support we needed. They have become an active partner in Gabe’s care.”

To learn more about home health care services for children with special needs, call 800-305-3000 or visit www.bayada.com.

Founded in 1975 by J. Mark Baiada, BAYADA Home Health Care provides nursing, rehabilitative, therapeutic, hospice, and assistive care services to children, adults, and seniors in the comfort of their homes. Headquartered in suburban Philadelphia, BAYADA employs more than 18,000 nurses, home health aides, therapists, medical social workers, and other home health care professionals who serve their communities in 25 states from more than 250 offices. For more information, visit www.bayada.com.



Gabe DaCosta, 10, who has cerebral palsy, benefits from home health care provided by his nurse from BAYADA John Bowen, RN.