

# CaregiverSD

## + HEALTH

"I as a caregiver want to be able to use every resource available to me. I find that friends of ours don't really understand. ... It affects everything."

Mary Ellen Gross



K.C. ALFRED U-T PHOTOS

Mary Ellen Gross checks the blood pressure of her husband, Ted, who normally uses day care at a dementia center. Results go immediately to his health care team.

## A DIGITAL ASSISTANT

Glennercare app monitors dementia patients, provides advice and peace of mind for caregivers

BY LAUREN J. MAPP

**G**eorge G. Glenner Alzheimer's Family Centers have supported people living with dementia and their caregivers for more than three decades through adult day care services. Now, they're stepping into the digital age with the newly launched Glennercare app.

Seniors and those living with dementia receive day care services at Glenner locations in Hillcrest, Encinitas and Chula Vista.

Through the years, caregivers have asked for additional resources at night and on the weekends. This inspired the development of an app to provide additional support for people while at home, said Lisa Tyburski, chief marketing officer.



The Glennercare app provides a vital link to experts who can help determine if urgent help is needed.

Those signed up for the program receive a blood pressure monitor so they or their caregiver can regularly track it, and the Glennercare team can look for sudden changes.

Through daily monitoring, the care team may detect issues before they become major health problems. This includes times when a loved one suddenly starts exhibiting unusual behaviors, which can be a symptom of a urinary tract infection.

In some cases, Tyburski said, caregivers don't know what steps are or aren't necessary to take.

"They'll just get in the car and they go to the ER or urgent care or hospital or whatever to get answers, and they wait in the waiting room," she said. "And now, especially with COVID-19, it's that much scarier."

By connecting with the Glenner team

SEE APP • E2

## THE NEW SENIOR CENTER TAKES SHAPE AS VIRTUAL COMMUNITY

San Diego Oasis adds 50-and-older students after shift to online-only classes

BY LAUREN J. MAPP

While she was battling coronavirus, Spanish teacher Gladis Jiménez was thinking of her students from San Diego Oasis, a center offering lifelong learning and healthy living classes for students age 50 or older. Visitors weren't able to come see her during her two-week stay in the hospital, and feelings of loneliness grew during her time there.

"I learned my lesson from being in the hospital for two weeks, completely isolated," she said. "The nurses came in and they just did their thing and left, so no conversation at all. I was thinking about these students that I have in Oasis."

The 52-year-old worried that the members of her classes, whom she's become friends with over the years, were experiencing the same feelings of social isolation during the state's stay-at-home order.

Now that she has returned to her home in Hillcrest, Jiménez is back to teaching older adults online.

Last month, San Diego Oasis



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Gladis Jiménez's online Spanish classes at San Diego Oasis are helping her students combat social isolation.

shifted from its regular in-person format to a smaller number of online-only classes. As the length of time people are stuck at home has increased, the virtual space has grown into a global senior center.

So far, 3,122 people have participated in the 244 online programs.

Older adults from across the country — and as far away as Canada and China — are partici-

SEE ONLINE • E2

VERONICA MITCHELL Caregiving Advice

## You asked: Here are more tips for coping during pandemic

When I announced plans to finish my book "Get Real — Caregiving in 2020" and broaden the subject matter in my column, I also started to plan my content. Next thing I knew, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was talking about coronavirus, and now we are living through a pandemic.

Many things are changing as caregivers adjust to a new normal while caregiving for loved ones. I am addressing some questions from readers, clients, friends and family members during the COVID-19 outbreak in hopes of making caregivers' lives a little easier.

### A quick review of what works

We all need trusted, reliable sources so we can make the best decisions for ourselves and our loved ones. Below are several organizations that offer evidence-based facts, information and resources on caregiving through a pandemic:

- Elizabeth Dole Foundation: [www.elizabethdolefoundation.org](http://www.elizabethdolefoundation.org)
- Roslyn Carter Institute for Caregiving: [www.rosalyncarter.org](http://www.rosalyncarter.org)
- Caring for Someone — Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/)

if-you-are-sick/care-for-someone.html

- San Diego County's Live Well San Diego initiative: [www.livewellsd.org/content/livewell/home/live-well-every-day/livewellathome.html](http://www.livewellsd.org/content/livewell/home/live-well-every-day/livewellathome.html)

Look for resources for specific

Many things are changing as caregivers adjust to a new normal while caregiving for loved ones.

caregiving situations so caregivers can easily access them. Collect them into digital folders. Print and post tips throughout the home as reminders. Keep a journal, written and/or digital, to track your days, tasks, expenses and healthcare with detailed notes. Start a group email to communicate with all necessary parties. These group communications, whether through recorded

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## APP

FROM E1 through the app, caregivers can be guided through necessary steps, without a potential overreaction.

With adult day care centers and other senior programs closed to prevent the spread of coronavirus, many caregivers are experiencing heightened levels of stress, said Tanya Navarro, master level social worker.

"Some of our members lost many vital and essential programs," Navarro said. "Those offered respite to many of our family caregivers, and now they have their loved one at home 24/7."

Through the app, Navarro and medical staff are available to help users connect to services for long-term care placement and food. She can also provide crisis intervention and brainstorm ideas with family members to curb their care recipient's dementia behaviors.

Navarro was first introduced to dementia care as her family cared for her grandmother. She uses that experience to further connect with the clients she serves.

"This is a vulnerable population — vulnerable for compassion fatigue, for caregiver burnout. ... Sometimes, that care subtracts from taking care of yourself," Navarro said. "There's a lot of support because there's some level of understanding that I've walked in your shoes, so I get you. I understand where you're coming from."



K.C. ALFRED U-T

"We caregivers of people with dementia are totally out on a limb. We're always afraid that somehow that limb is going to break."

Mary Ellen Gross, caregiver for her husband, Ted, who has frontotemporal dementia

One of the early adopters of the app, Mary Ellen Gross, cares for her husband, Ted, 88. They originally became involved as volunteers with the Glenner Centers through their son, who is a former board chairman for the nonprofit.

Ted, a veteran who served in the Navy, Coast Guard and Marines, is legally blind and living with frontotemporal dementia, which is caused by nerve cell damage in the front of the brain. Mary Ellen said he was initially misdiag-

nosed with Alzheimer's disease, which is linked to nerve loss in the back of the brain.

Mary Ellen used to worry that he'd fall in the middle of the night or that there would be a health crisis she couldn't quickly

resolve on her own.

"We caregivers of people with dementia are totally out on a limb," Mary Ellen said. "We're always afraid that somehow that limb is going to break."

Now, the 76-year-old sees the app as a helpful tool she

can use to provide the best care for her husband.

"I as a caregiver want to be able to use every resource available to me," Mary Ellen said. "I find that friends of ours don't really understand."

"It's different than another illness, God forbid, like cancer, heart disease or something like that because it affects everything in your life and for a continuum."

Being a caregiver for someone living with a form of dementia can be isolating, Mary Ellen added, but the app is helping her to feel more supported.

"I hope that Glenner care goes national because if this is what I'm experiencing, you can bet there are other people all around the country that are, too," she said. "The thing for me that's the driving force for why I've been involved with Glenner is that I don't want people to feel alone."

Glenner has suspended in-person services because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the app is providing assistance to caregivers during the state's stay-at-home order.

The service is covered by Medicare Plan B, or it can be paid for out of pocket at \$91.25 per month. There is no contract, so service can be canceled at any time. To learn more, call (833) 770-CARE, email [glennercare@glenner.org](mailto:glennercare@glenner.org) or visit [www.glenner.org/glennercare](http://www.glenner.org/glennercare).

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## ONLINE

FROM E1 participating in the courses, support groups and book clubs as a way to continue a sense of community, said Simona Valanciute, San Diego Oasis CEO and president.

"The fascinating thing is that we used to be a very local, very family-oriented group of people," Valanciute said. "Now that we've gone virtual, not only are we keeping our 'family Oasis feel,' we are also gaining people and perspectives from all over the world."

As more people join the

platform, Oasis has been able to adapt quickly to their needs. Instead of the usual six-month lead time before a class starts, classes can be created and launched in real time based on student requests.

As the state's stay-at-home order was put in place, many organizations serving seniors shifted to online models because they can no longer serve the community face to face.

The average student at Oasis is 71 years old, putting them in a demographic that's vulnerable to social isolation and loneliness. Isolation can lead to a de-

cline in physical health, according to the National Institute on Aging, so although social distancing is important in safeguarding older populations from coronavirus, they may suffer in other ways.

Through the online classes and group meetings, students are able to socialize and catch up with their friends. And they're learning new digital skills — like how to video conference — that they may not have used otherwise.

"We know from a lot of research that seniors have a difficult time adopting new technology," Valanciute



K.C. ALFRED U-T

Gladis Jiménez learned firsthand what social isolation is like during a bout with the coronavirus.

said, "but with the correct support and pace for seniors to learn, once they master those technology skills, they will become the most loyal, consistent technology users."

Learning these tools now could have positive long-term effects on how seniors interact with

friends and family in the future.

Bob and Joann Mogg, who are both 61, have taken more than 187 classes at San Diego Oasis since they retired six years ago. They have participated in several classes since they were shifted to an online format in March to

stay intellectually active.

"I think getting out and getting exposed to different concepts and other people's views is really valuable," Bob said.

The experience has inspired him to use Zoom for other purposes, like setting up Dungeons and Dragons quests with his friends. The tabletop role-playing game used to be one of his regular hobbies, until his friends became too busy to play.

Bob thinks that it's now a good time to restart while everyone is social distancing at home.

"It's hard to get a whole cast of people together," he said. "I figure now that they're trapped in their homes, they might start looking for entertainment, so it might be a little easier to put that together."

For more information on Oasis class offerings, call (619) 881-6262 or visit [www.oasisnet.org](http://www.oasisnet.org).

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## ANESTHESIA OPTION MAY BE SAFER

### HEALTHDAY NEWS

No one wants to be in the hospital during the coronavirus pandemic, but people who need emergency surgery may have no choice.

If that's the case for you or a loved one, ask about using regional anesthesia. That's the advice of experts from the American Society of Regional Anesthesia and Pain Medicine (ASRA) and the European Society of Regional Anaesthesia and Pain Therapy.

The groups have issued recommendations to help health care providers take care of patients during the COVID-19 outbreak.

At the top of the list is asking physicians about the possibility of receiving regional anesthesia rather

than general anesthesia.

During general anesthesia, the patient is unconscious and connected to a breathing machine, while regional anesthesia involves numbing the specific region of the body that requires surgery, such as an arm or a knee.

When regional anesthesia is used, patients can still be sedated and won't feel anything during the procedure, the experts explained.

The advantage of regional anesthesia is that it's safer for everyone in the room during surgery and reduces the risk of complications after surgery, the two groups said in an ASRA news release.

General anesthesia can require placement of a tube in the patient's airway, which

results in what's called aerosol generation. If the patient has a respiratory infection, the medical team can be exposed to the aerosols during insertion or removal of the patient's breathing tube.

Research shows that the risk of transmitting infection during breathing tube insertion is 6.6 times higher than without it, according to ASRA.

Regional anesthesia is also associated with a lower risk of complications after surgery. For a patient with COVID-19, these risks are likely to be more significant due to chest infection.

The American Society of Anesthesiologists has more information on types of anesthesia at [www.asahq.org](http://www.asahq.org).

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