

# BUSINESS

## More than just a caregiver

Her business helps Stepanians offer variety of geriatric services

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**PASADENA** — Larissa Stepanians knew what she wanted to do from a young age. And after volunteering at nursing homes her mind was made up. Upon earning her bachelor's degree in biology from the USC, Stepanians considered the pre-med route.

Instead, she followed her interest of gerontology and minored in the subject at USC. Stepanians found herself enjoying her professors. And the feeling of a family relationship among them was too much to ignore.

"I began to think about long-term care administration," she said.

That thought process ultimately led to her current role as co-founder and president of **Huntington Care**, a Pasadena-based business that provides in-home care and companionship for elderly residents and others with similar needs.

After receiving her master's degree, Stepanians earned a graduate certificate in long-term care administration from USC's School of Policy, Planning and Development.

Upon graduation, she became an administrator-in-training for Country Villa Health Services in Los Angeles.

She subsequently stepped up to become a licensed administrator at both the state and federal levels. She then began running nursing homes — and had several facilities under her charge.

"I always ran facilities with good quality care and with good health department surveys," she said. A promotion came next.

Stepanians was named senior administrator of Country Villa where she ran several facilities. Soon after, she was promoted to vice president of operations.

In 2001, despite her success, she felt the need to make a change. Stepanians knew she wanted to have her own company and work with her passion — the elderly.

"I wanted that hands-on relationship and to be able to directly influence the caregivers right from the beginning," the 31-year-old Pasadena resident said.

Stepanians co-founded Huntington Care in May 2007 along with her husband, Carlo Stepanians.

After becoming a geriatric care manager, Stepanians was recognized by the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers as one of three professional GCMs in Pasadena.

There are two entities under the umbrella of Huntington Care. **Huntington Homecare**, which deals mainly in the San Gabriel and San Fernando valleys, and **Geriatric Care Services**, which is a wider-reaching company



SARAH REINGEWIRTZ / STAFF

**SERVING WITH HEART:** Larissa Stepanians, a geriatric care manager in skilled nursing and a member of Pasadena's Senior Commission, is co-founder of Huntington Home Care in Pasadena. "I wanted that hands-on relationship and to be able to directly influence the caregivers right from the beginning," she said.

spanning to such cities as West Los Angeles, Hollywood and beach cities as well as the San Gabriel and San Fernando valleys.

Huntington Homecare is proficient in such services as caring companionship, meal planning and preparation, medication management, grocery shopping, transportation, running errands, light housekeeping/laundry and also bathing/dressing, if needed.

Huntington also is capable of handling transfer/standby assistance and specializes in full-time, live-in care.

The business also offers a range of specialized services including range-of-motion exercises, Alzheimer's care and post-surgical and family respite care. Rehabilitation assistance and memory exercises are also available.

Caregivers are hand-picked by the company, and each potential employee is thoroughly screened and must undergo a background check. After passing this initial phase, each job hopeful is orientated, trained and prepped to handle his or her client. Huntington strives to match the best-suited caregiver with each client.

### LADDER OF SUCCESS

Larissa Stepanians

- ▶ **TITLE:** Co-founder, president
- ▶ **BUSINESS:** Huntington Care, parent of two geriatric-care companies
- ▶ **SERVICES:** Provides in-home care and companionship to seniors
- ▶ **LOCATION:** Pasadena
- ▶ **SECRET OF SUCCESS:** A gerontology background and her strong sense of caring for elderly clients

All employees are directly supervised by geriatric care managers.

What sets Stepanians' company apart from other homecare companies is the constant communication between the caregiver, the client and Stepanians herself.

Caregivers are often shocked at how efficient Huntington's internal level of communication is.

"Everyone is aware of what's going on at all times," Stepanians said.

Stepanians does a thorough assessment to learn the specific needs of each client.

Based on her clinical knowledge and

information included with the patient discharge order — from either a hospital or physician — Stepanians devises a plan of care for the client.

Then she goes over the plan with the chosen caregiver for the job. The patient's family is also given a copy of the plan.

Next, an introduction takes place between the client, Stepanians, the caregiver and a family member.

"The first week is usually an introduction time for us," she said. "We want the family to have as much information as possible."

Stepanians uses this first week to ask

questions and gauge the family's expectations of care.

Needs may change, so a lot of pre-planning is done by Stepanians to prevent potential crisis-control situations.

Most Huntington clients are 74 or older, although the company does care for younger patients, some of whom have cancer.

"Lately, we've been seeing a pattern where the client has lost a spouse to cancer and now has cancer themselves," Stepanians said. "Most of the time, the family is far away and can't take care of them."

One male cancer patient only needs Huntington's services for meal preparation and bathing from 5 to 9 p.m.

But on a recent Saturday, Stepanians took it upon herself to bring him a shower chair to help him during the weekends.

Her compassion and caring for the elderly is a big part of what makes Stepanians' business run so successfully.

"Whatever will provide better quality living for the elderly ... that's what I'll do," she said. "That's what I'm interested in."