

# Lessons Learned

by April Kaplan

Too often, transportation is an afterthought. We are all so used to hopping in our cars and going wherever we want, that we simply cannot understand that transportation is often the most serious barrier to adequate health care. I know better.

As a medical case manager intern at a managed health care facility, I saw first-hand the critical nature of transportation. I was given the opportunity to see many clients with varying degrees of problems and varying ages — from newborns to the elderly. But the transportation problem affected not only my clients, but also family members. Many of us take it for granted that if we became hospitalized, our loved ones would come to visit and see us through to good health. Such is not always the case.

A patient's support structure, we found, was a key to their recovery. Family members can provide significant emotional and psychological support. But involving family members in a patient's recovery would mean that they would often need transportation to-and-from the hospital or nursing home. Transportation barriers, thus, isolated many individuals and became an impediment to recovery.

We were reminded daily about the impact of isolation. I recall a welfare mother who needed to get to the hospital to see her three month old baby, but could not afford a taxi and no bus or public transportation served the area. Imagine not being able to visit with and comfort a sick child. Another time, an elderly woman was unable to visit with her sick husband because she could neither drive nor afford cab fare. I even remember a time where a patient was ready to be discharged from the hospital but had no way to get home.

These clients were helpless due to lack of transportation. And for these people, transportation had become far more than an ancillary service, rather, it had become a sturdy barrier. We case workers found that too often the bus system simply didn't meet our client's needs. Taxis were far too expensive. Few solutions existed.

Today, we as a country are dealing with fundamental changes to our welfare system. I know just how critical transportation will be to getting people back to work, just as I learned how important it was in helping people be healthy. I now work for an organization in Washington, D.C., that seeks to provide complete information on welfare reform and innovative solutions to connecting people with

jobs. My experience tells me that transportation is more than just a support service.