

HEALTH & FITNESS

Direct line to help

By DAVE NORDSTRAND | The Salinas Californian

Wristband offers unique service through SVMH

The piece of technology strapped to the wrist of 81-year-old Carmela Lucido of Salinas gives her peace of mind and gives her family peace of mind, too.

"I know that, if I'm in trouble, and I press this button, someone will come," she said.

"It gives me a secure feeling."

By pressing her "personal help button," her PHB, Lucido summons a service which checks on her status and dispatches help if needed.

About 320 Salinas-area residents wear the Lifeline PHB, a program run mostly by Service League volunteers at Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital.

In 1989, SVMH took over the service from Natividad Medical Center at Natividad's request. But after 17 years, many who could benefit still don't realize that such a service exists, SVMH's Lynn Brooks said.

Brooks is director of Volunteer and Health Career Services, under which the Lifeline program falls.

"As people age, they want to continue to be independent in their homes," Brooks said. "This system can help them with that."

Lucido ordered her Lifeline seven years ago after falling in her home at night. The fall left her unable to stand. She was rescued only after her daughter tried repeatedly to reach her by phone and Lucido failed to pick up the receiver.

Brooks visited Lucido in her hospital room and convinced her to try the Lifeline system. Now a true believer, Lucido urges friends to sign on.

She wears her PHB to bed, in the shower, in the kitchen and when she's out in the yard. She wears it 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

DETAILS

For more on the **Lifeline** 24-hour, 7-day-a-week emergency response program at **Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital**, call the hospital at 755-0788.

The Lifeline system — other brands exist — costs \$37 to \$45 per month, depending on unit type. There's a \$30 enrollment fee, a \$30 lifetime service fee and a deposit of between \$37 and \$45. Insurance does not cover costs.

Jacquie Daley of Salinas has good reason to appreciate the system. Daley has two artificial knees and a pacemaker, she said.

Two years ago, coming back from a Christmas party, she fell backward in her garage.

"I hit my back and head, and there I lay,"

"Just knowing my mother is safe in her home is a blessing."

— Rosemary Tarp

Lifeline employee and daughter of Lifeline client

Daley said.

Though she couldn't stand, she managed to get the door to the house open. Her two dogs greeted her but were unable help. She pressed the button on her PHB, which she wore around her neck.

"Please help me," I said, and they did immediately," Daley said. "My friend and a couple of neighbors came over right away. I was bruised head to toe."

Since then Daley has used the device two other times.

"With my artificial knees, I can't get up without a push or a pull," she said.

Part of the system is a phone which transmits the signal from the PHB. Immediately a voice — the hospital subscribes to a service in Boston — comes on the speaker.



Carmela Lucido of Salinas wears a 'Personal Help Button' on her wrist, which is a direct line to a volunteer at Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital who can provide help in case of emergency.

"Are you all right? Do you need help?"

Depending on the response, Boston may contact an "immediate responder" such as a neighbor or family member. If it's an emergency, the service calls 911.

The device has a range of 500 feet, Brooks said. Installers for the system are Service League volunteers.

"It also extends to someone trying to break in," Brooks said. "We'll call the local police immediately."

Newly upgraded phones allow caregivers to leave messages, too, such as a reminder about a doctor appointment.

An optional feature requires the client to phone in morning and night. If they fail to do so, Lifeline checks on their welfare.

The system services clients from King City to Aromas as well as Hollister, Marina and even on the Monterey Peninsula, though Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula has its own extensive service.

Rosemary Tarp, a paid employee with Lifeline at SVMH is also Lucido's daughter. She got her job coincidentally after her mother suffered her fall. "Just knowing my mother is safe in her home is a blessing," Tarp said. ♦