

Finding *Your* WAY

VNA Hospice of Indian River County • Caregiver Newsletter

What is a Family Caregiver?

At a time when hospitals are releasing patients earlier, the elderly are living longer, and people are living with many chronic illnesses, more family members and friends have begun to care for loved ones at home. Often, people find themselves having to perform new and unfamiliar tasks. These may include giving medicines, helping with personal care, assisting with meals, and even performing medical and nursing procedures. While there are a host of names to describe this role - "primary caregiver," "care-partner," "informal caregiver" - the term "family caregiver" may be best. A **family caregiver is anyone who provides any type of physical and/or emotional care for an ill or disabled loved one at home.** For this definition, "family" refers to a nonprofessional who is called "family" by the person who is sick. Sometimes, family is whoever shows up to help.

There are different types of family

caregivers. Some caregivers are parents of children with physical, mental or emotional illness. Some are adult children of aging and frail parents who can no longer care for themselves. Others are spouses, life-partners, family members, neighbors or friends, caring for loved ones suffering from an illness or disability. People can become caregivers gradually when a loved one develops a progressive illness that worsens over time, or they can be thrust into the role unexpectedly when a family member has a sudden medical illness, accident or injury.

Regardless of how you became a caregiver, you are about to take on a new role for which you may not feel prepared. It is normal for you to feel nervous or overwhelmed about what is expected of you. You may experience a number of mixed emotions including anxiety, anger and sadness. At the same time, you'll probably feel the desire to

care for your loved one as best as you can.

This means getting information, recognizing when you need help, asking for and accepting assistance from others, and taking care of yourself. This guide will also help you be a more prepared caregiver by:

- Offering practical tips, facts and advice about caring for a loved one
- Providing a way for you to organize resource and medical information
- Helping you recognize and attending to your own needs

Source: Fraidin, L., Glajchen, M., & Portenoy, R.K. (2000) *The Caregiver Resource Directory: A Practical Guide for Family Caregivers*. New York: Beth Israel Medical Center.

COPES

COPES: Caregivers Ongoing Practical Education and Support Group meets the third Thursday of each month to provide caregivers with the support they may need while shouldering multiple responsibilities for loved ones, as well as to share resources. Meetings are held at the First Presbyterian Church, 1405 Louisiana Avenue, Sebastian, from 10-11 a.m., and at the Royal Palm Convalescent Center, 2180 10th Avenue, Vero Beach, from 1:30 - 2:30 p.m.

Dates for 2006

July 20	Oct. 19
Aug. 17	Nov. 16
Sept. 21	Dec. 21

Helpful Resources for Caregivers

National Family Caregivers Association

Maintains a peer support network that puts caregivers in touch with others in similar situations and offers a newsletter and other printed materials with information and resources.

www.caregivingfoundation.org

Well Spouse Foundation

Provides support to spouses/partners of the ill or disabled through support groups, caregiver networks and a bimonthly newsletter.

www.wellspouse.org

Coping With Your New Role

Address Your Feelings

Although these feelings are expected and often subside on their own, they can be upsetting. Some people have trouble adapting to the new situation. It is important to recognize if this is happening to you and, if so, to talk to someone. Friends and family members are a great place to start. Try not to think about being a “burden” on others or hold back in fear of their judgment. You are experiencing a big challenge and it is ok for you to turn to your family and close friends for help.

Sometimes you may not feel comfortable sharing certain feelings with those who also have

a relationship with the patient. However, this does not mean that you should ignore or hold these emotions inside. Finding an uninvolved party to listen to your concerns can be very comforting and necessary during this time. The more in touch you are with your feelings, the better you will be able to cope when faced with the stress of caregiving. There are many places you can turn to find someone who will listen and offer support while you express your feelings:

- VNA Hospice support group
- Your church, synagogue or

mosque

- A psychologist, social worker or therapist
- Internet chat rooms with other caregivers
- National caregiver organizations
- National or regional organizations specific to your loved one's illness

Boost Your Knowledge

Many new caregivers find that learning about caregiving and the patient's illness helps relieve their anxiety.

Taking Stock

If you are the primary family caregiver for your loved one, it will fall on you to work with the health care team and make sure that all of the patient's needs are met. This can be an overwhelming and strenuous task, especially if you try to handle all of the responsibilities on your own. It may not even be possible for one person to perform all of the duties required in caring for your loved one. In order to gain some control over the situation you

must make a plan of action.

There are three main steps in developing a plan of action:

1. Determine the needs of the patient.

List the activities that must be done for the patient to be properly cared for, being as specific as possible.

2. Decide which needs you can or would like to meet on your own.

Once you see exactly what caring for the patient will require, you can assess your resources. There will

be caregiving responsibilities you can handle on your own, and some that will require assistance.

3. Determine which needs can or must be met by others.

Though you may feel the desire to do everything on your own and not “burden” others, learning to ask for help is vital to minimize exhaustion - a condition called “burnout.” This will also ensure that more of your loved one's needs will be met.

Spiritual Care Corner

The thoughts you have shared
Have opened our eyes
And broadened our view.
Never give up but let things go
Keep a balance - take care of you!

You have taught us so very well
Opened up many options
Until we hear the final bell

Listen with your heart
And reach out by phone
No person needs to be alone
And you made us smart - with a smile.

Written by Jane Dunphy for VNA Social Services Manager Lana Taylor

The Beauty of Story/The Joy of Listening

• Anything can be born if the story can be told.

• Stories are woven through the fabric of our lives — they are the threads which bind us together.

• Telling or writing our story puts the experience outside of us — letting us see our pain or sorrow in a new and different light.

• Telling our story lets us see our common soul, our community spirit, and our own strength and beauty.

• We who have the great privilege of caring for those who grieve

know the power of their stories.

We are hearts with ears.

We are smiles with hands to hold.

We are shoulders for absorbing tears.

We are the listeners.



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