



Caregiver Stress: Avoiding Burnout

PMH

Information for People Caring for a Loved One with Cancer



Patient Education

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An Affirmation of Those Who Care James E. Miller

I believe in people who care.

Even more, I believe in what these generous people offer others.

They bring caregiving down to its essentials:

They offer not abstract ideas, but personal attention;

not definitive answers, but reasonable assurance;

not empty platitudes, but authentic hope.

I believe the work they do is both deceptively simple and usually difficult.

For their task is to offer those who so need it something irreplaceable: Their own humanness.

They bestow a priceless gift: only themselves, and all of themselves.

They approach the other holding out what they have to offer: Their sensitivity, their dedication, their belief.

They bring into the open what they choose not to hide:

their honesty, their woundedness, their compassion.

What these emphatic people do requires real courage, for they do not know how they will be received, or if they will be understood.

What they give requires great perseverance, for healing is a time-consuming process, and staying with others in their pain is an energy-draining experience.

But if these souls did not perform their roles in the way they do, then in a very real sense the Word would not be made flesh.

The Love would not be made visible and the Hope would not be made genuine.

Yet because such committed caregivers are among us,
we know the world is not just a better place but ours is a
better time and we are a better people.

We know that because those who truly care show us,
day after day after day

Did you know that caregivers often experience a higher level of stress than the patients themselves?

As a caregiver, you may find yourself so busy caring for your loved one that you forget to care for yourself. Or, it may seem to you that there just isn't enough time to care for both your loved one and for yourself. You may deal with this by giving more and more of your time to your loved one's needs. As a result, your needs are left unmet. However, it's important to realize that your well-being has a direct impact on your loved one's well-being. Studies show that increased pressure, tension and anxiety of the caregiver also increases the level of stress of patients and decreases their overall well-being.

Caregiver Stress Test

Answer "never", "sometimes", "usually", or "always" for each of the following:

- I find I can't get enough rest
- I don't have time for myself
- I don't have enough time to be with other family members besides the person I care for
- I feel guilty about my situation
- I don't get out much anymore

- I have conflicts with the person I care for
- I have conflicts with other family members
- I cry everyday
- I worry about having enough money to make ends meet
- I don't feel I have enough knowledge or experience to give care as well as I'd like
- My own health is not good

If you answered "usually" or "always" to any of the above, you may be experiencing caregiver stress.

Common Types of Caregiver Stress

Physical: The many roles and responsibilities faced by caregivers cause an increase in strain on the body.

Financial: Caregivers often have to deal with the many costs involved in providing care.

Environmental: Caregivers are often required to cope with major changes in their previous living arrangements and daily routines.

Social: Caregivers are often so committed to providing care that they sometimes cut themselves off from family and friends.

Emotional: All of the above factors can lead to intense emotional distress. It is not uncommon for caregivers to feel: angry, depressed, lonely, afraid, guilty, embarrassed, frustrated, helpless, or neglected.

It is important to be aware of the types of stress you are experiencing, in order to be able to make helpful changes to your situation.

What Can I Do to Avoid the Burnout?

- Eat three balanced meals a day.
- Get out and exercise at least once a week.
- Get a good night's sleep.
- Build a support system or join a support group.
- Maintain open, honest communication with friends/ family.
- Be gentle to yourself and accept your feelings.
- Make sure you keep your medical and dental appointments. Be realistic about what you can and cannot do.
- Look at your priorities; don't try to do everything.
- Ask for help when you need it.
- Make time for relaxation and self-care for yourself.

Relaxation Exercise

Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Close your eyes. Place your hands on your stomach. Take a deep breath in through your nose and feel your stomach push outwards. Hold your breath for a count of 3. Breathe out through your mouth slowly and feel your stomach fall inwards. Continue to take several deep breaths and allow your body to relax.

Imagine a place that is very relaxing for you. It might be the seashore, a meadow, a mountain, a garden. Let yourself be totally present in your place of relaxation and experience all of the sights, sounds, tastes, smells and touches in it. You are in total control of this scene. Allow yourself to feel completely relaxed and at peace in mind and body.

Let yourself return to your place of relaxation at any time during the day to feel refreshed and free.

Where to Get Help

While your loved one is in the hospital, you may choose to access any of the following support services, at no cost:

Patient and Family Resource Centres

(416) 946-4501 ext. 5090

patienteducationpmh@unh.on.ca

Main Floor, Princess Margaret Hospital

Psychosocial Oncology

(416) 946-4525

- Social Work:

Emotional support and counseling, resource counseling, discharge planning, consultation with community service providers.

(416) 946-4525

- Psychiatry

Psychological support and treatment.

(416) 946-4501 ext. 5405

- Occupational Therapy

Relaxation therapy and training.

(416) 946-4501 ext. 5580

- Palliative Care Team

Consultation and community support.

(416) 946-2135

- Chaplaincy

Non-denominational spiritual support.

(416) 946- 4460

Community Care Access Centre:

(416) 946-4501 ext. 4560

May provide necessary equipment and personal support for a safe transition home.

Once your loved one is back at home, you may find it helpful to contact the following community resources:

Canadian Cancer Society:

(416) 488-5400

www.ontario.cancer.ca

- Emotional Support by telephone (1-800-263-6750) or face-to-face counseling
- Transportation to and from medical appointments
- Reliable, up-to-date information
- Links to companionship services, housekeeping services, respite care, day care services

Wellspring:

(416) 961-1928

Support centre for patients and families living with cancer.

1 Stall, R.S. (2001). Caregiver's Handbook. The Caregiver Education and Support Services Division. San Diego County Mental Health Services. San Diego , CA.
<http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~drstall/hndbk3.html>

11 Coping with Caregiver Stress. (2001) Nursing and Rehabilitation Centres: Saint Barnabas Health Care System. http://www.sbhcs.com/hospitals/nursing_homes/tips/coping.htm

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