

Recognizing Caregiver Stress



As the number of Canadian seniors continues to swell, unpaid caregiving has become more widespread than ever before. Over 4.5 million Canadians play a role in caring for an elderly family member or someone with long-term health problems. Family caregivers have become important members of the patient recovery and care team, but with very limited resources and financial support. As a result, caregiver stress and burnout has become a significant issue.

So what can be done to help? Caregivers and their loved ones should be on the lookout for the major signs of caregiver stress:

- No longer participating in activities once enjoyed.
- Withdrawing from friends/family.
- Denial about the severity and outcome of the family member's disability/disease.
- Increased anxiety.
- Changes in appetite, weight.
- Changes in sleeping patterns.

- Getting upset more quickly than normal.
- Feeling down, irritable, hopeless and helpless.
- Getting sick more often.
- Lack of concentration.

As the aging of our population accelerates and healthcare policy increases its focus on transferring care to the home front, caregiver stress will be an even greater challenge in the years ahead. We need to help caregivers to prioritize self-care and, when possible, help one another.

Practical Advice to Prevent Caregiver Burnout:

- **Look after #1:** Take care of your own health by exercising and eating well, and recognize the danger signs your mind and body send out to you.
- **Set Boundaries:** Be honest about how much care you can realistically provide.
- **Find Balance:** Set aside time for yourself amongst your work, family and caregiving responsibilities.
- **Pay for Aid:** Take advantage of products and services that can relieve the pressure you're under.
- **Take a Break:** "Respite care" can provide temporary caregiving for your loved one while you enjoy a much-needed break.
- **Ask for Help:** Talk to a professional who is trained in caregiver counselling, join a support group, check out options available through your employee assistance program or government/community programs.

One thing is certain... Today's family caregivers deserve our utmost respect and gratitude. Whether motivated by love, duty or simply a selfless desire to help others, they play an invaluable role in the care of our senior population.

Jane McPherson, Philips Lifeline

Interior Health Lifeline Program

A not-for-profit, hospital based, community supported program, providing home emergency response monitoring services to seniors, the medically at risk, and physically challenged individuals. Lifeline - a caring connection which promotes safety and independence.

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