

## Caregivers need CARE also!

Most of us will be caregivers at some stage in our lives because we provide essential compassion, support, love and assistance to family members, close friends or neighbors. A small percent of caregivers will do so for payment if they are hired as a nanny for children or as a personal care attendant for someone with special physical needs. However, the fastest growing group of caregivers is unpaid adults who of necessity must spend time caring for a loved one that is sick, elderly, or has special needs.

The National Alliance of Caregiving in collaboration with MetLife and the AARP conducted research in 2009 which revealed that more than 30% of all U.S. adults are serving as caregivers for aging parents, special needs children or spouses with chronic illnesses. Almost 75% of this group is also holding down jobs outside the home and two of three caregivers are women. Additionally, more than 37% of these women also have children or grandchildren under age 18 living with them. The report also stated that old age is the primary reason for requiring caregiving followed by Alzheimer's disease, emotional or mental illness, cancer, heart disease and strokes. On average, caregiver services are required 20 hours every week for approximately 4.6 years.

Family caregivers are the foundation of long-term care nationwide exceeding Medicaid long-term care spending in all states. The National Alliance of Caregiving further reports that the value of their services, provided for "free" when caring for older adults, is estimated to be \$375 billion a year. 36% of all caregivers care for a parent and seven of ten caregivers are caring for someone at least 50 years old. The average family caregiver, caring for someone at least age 50, spends over \$5,000 annually on out-of-pocket expenses including gasoline/auto expenses, convenience foods, "babysitting", over the counter medications, and home incidentals.

But economics is certainly not the only potential negative consequence of being a caregiver. Caregiver burnout or stress often occurs with one or more of the following physical and emotional symptoms:

- Being tired or having a change in sleeping pattern
- Moodiness, irritability, being easily frustrated
- Muscle tension, headaches, back or neck pain
- Weight fluctuation or a change in eating habits
- Feeling overwhelmed and sensing a loss of control in daily routines
- Feelings of anger, sadness, isolation, exhaustion – and then guilt for having these feelings

Most important is that the caregiver recognizes that he/she needs care also! Guilt and other painful feelings as well as physical ailments are the body's way of saying "Pay attention". Actions that might reduce the seriousness of the impact include:

- Sharing of feelings with a friend, family member or professional
- Making time for self every day even if it is 15 to 30 minutes of "me time"
- Identifying at least one community agency that can be a resource to reduce the load (contact the local area agency on aging as a beginning point...locally we are fortunate to have Senior Services, Midland County Council on Aging which can help)
- Joining a caregiver support group
- Setting boundaries and asking others for help by suggesting specific things needed
- Replenishing self via exercise, reading, listening to music, etc. as a means of reducing stress

Caregivers will be more effective if they care also for themselves and know their limits. Caring for oneself is not selfish, it can be thought of as a gift to both your loved one and to yourself.

Most caregivers are thrust into this role without warning and family caregivers rarely have the skills or training they need to provide the care that they take on when a family member needs them. Senior Services of Midland County and Delta College both recognize this need and both offer training sessions. Delta College just received grant funding for full scholarships for two caregiver training options. The Personal Care Attendant Program begins May 10 and is job skill training for individuals seeking employment in this field. The second option is the National Caregiver Training Program which is designed for the non paid in-home caregiver ....this option begins June 6 and is a combination of online instruction plus in person CPR training and two on campus lab sessions of five hours each. If interested in either of these programs or interested in making an application for the scholarships contact the Delta College LifeLong Learning Department at (989)686-9444.

Rosalyn Carter probably said it best “There are only four kinds of people in the world – those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers, those who will be caregivers, and those who will need caregivers.”

You can learn about caregiving and ask your questions of caregiver specialist Kathleen Fox at the Friday, May 20<sup>th</sup> “Bits and Bites” program sponsored by the Delta College 50+...*Just Like Gold Program*. Every month these sessions (the format is a bit of information along with a bite to eat) introduce topics of interest to the 50+ population. The May 20<sup>th</sup> meeting will be held at the Delta College Planetarium & Learning Center in downtown Bay City. We invite you to join us for lunch and the caregiver session and then spend the afternoon exploring the great opportunities in downtown Bay City. Treat yourself!

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