

CANCER AND THE CAREGIVER

THE CAREGIVER'S ROLE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

A DIAGNOSIS OF CANCER IS ONE OF THE MOST STRESSFUL EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF AN INDIVIDUAL- OR THAT OF A FAMILY. WHEN PEOPLE LEARN THAT SOMEONE THEY LOVE HAS CANCER, IT IS ONLY NATURAL TO WANT TO HELP. AND, AS HOSPITAL STAYS BECOME SHORTER, HELP AT HOME BECOMES MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER. GENERALLY, FAMILY MEMBERS TAKE ON THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND CHALLENGES OF CAREGIVING, ALTHOUGH FRIENDS CAN ALSO ASSUME THIS KEY ROLE. IF YOU ARE A CAREGIVER, YOU MUST BE PREPARED TO SACRIFICE A GREAT DEAL FOR THE SAKE OF A LOVED ONE. HOWEVER, YOU WILL ALSO EXPERIENCE GRATIFYING AND OFTEN UNEXPECTED REWARDS.

CAREGIVING INVOLVES BOTH STRESSES AND REWARDS

THERE IS NO DENYING THE IMPACT OF CANCER ON CAREGIVERS. YOU MIGHT HAVE TO REARRANGE YOUR LIFE TO MEET THE REQUIREMENTS OF BEING A CAREGIVER. IT CAN AFFECT YOU EMOTIONALLY, PHYSICALLY AND FINANCIALLY. HOWEVER, MANY PEOPLE FIND THAT BEING A CAREGIVER IS A DEEPLY REWARDING EXPERIENCE. IT CAN REVEAL HIDDEN STRENGTHS AND ENRICH FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS. IT CAN HELP YOU UNDERSTAND AND APPRECIATE WHAT IS TRULY IMPORTANT IN YOUR LIFE.

DEFINING YOUR ROLE AS A CAREGIVER

EVERYONE APPROACHES THE ROLE OF CANCER CAREGIVER FROM A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE. WITHIN THE SUPPORTIVE CIRCLE OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS, EACH MEMBER MAY ASSUME A SHARE OF THE WORK. IF THE CANCER PATIENT CAN FUNCTION INDEPENDENTLY DURING THE TREATMENT PERIOD, CAREGIVERS MAY ONLY BE CALLED UPON FOR EMOTIONAL SUPPORT. IF, ON THE OTHER HAND, THE PATIENT'S ACTIVITIES ARE SERIOUSLY LIMITED, CAREGIVERS WILL HAVE TO ASSUME A MUCH GREATER BURDEN. IN SUCH CASES, A PRIMARY CAREGIVER CAN BE DESIGNATED. THE PRIMARY CAREGIVER TAKES THE LEAD IN ORGANIZING CARE ROUTINES AND COMMUNICATING WITH DOCTORS AND OTHER HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS.

INFORMED CARE IS EFFECTIVE

THE MORE YOU KNOW ABOUT CANCER AND CAREGIVING, THE BETTER YOU CAN CARE FOR YOUR LOVED ONE. YOUR FIRST SOURCE OF INFORMATION IS THE PHYSICIAN. ACCOMPANY YOUR LOVED ONE ON DOCTOR'S VISITS. THAT WAY, YOU CAN BE SURE THAT YOU WON'T MISS ANY IMPORTANT INFORMATION, AND YOUR LOVED ONE WON'T HAVE TO REPEAT THE DOCTOR'S INSTRUCTIONS TO YOU. BY COMMUNICATING

DIRECTLY WITH THE PHYSICIAN AND OTHER HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS (INCLUDING NURSES, THERAPISTS AND COUNSELORS), YOU CAN FIND OUT ABOUT YOUR LOVED ONE'S SPECIFIC NEEDS AND HOW TO RECOGNIZE AND MANAGE SYMPTOMS. USING JOURNAL OR NOTEBOOK TO RECORD INSTRUCTIONS, APPOINTMENTS, TESTS AND OTHER INFORMATION WILL MAKE YOU MORE ACTIVE, EFFECTIVE MEMBER OF THE CARE TEAM. THE PHYSICIAN CAN ALSO HELP YOU IDENTIFY RESOURCES SUCH AS HOME HEALTH AGENCIES, HOSPICE SERVICES, SUPPORT GROUPS, AND FINANCIAL COUNSELORS. YOU WILL FIND THAT THERE IS A LOT OF HELP AVAILABLE, AND YOU SHOULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF IT- FOR YOUR OWN SAKE AS WELL AS YOUR LOVED ONE'S.

WORKING WITH CANCER PATIENT

GIVING CARE TO A CANCER PATIENT CAN REQUIRE PATIENCE, FLEXIBILITY, COURAGE, AND A SENSE OF HUMOR. TRY TO UNDERSTAND THE EXPERIENCE OF CANCER FROM THE PATIENT'S POINT OF VIEW. ASK QUESTIONS AND LISTEN CLOSELY TO THE RESPONSES. LOOKING BEYOND THE PHYSICAL ASPECTS OF CARE, TRY TO PROMOTE A SENSE OF INDEPENDENCE AND A POSITIVE OUTLOOK. CANCER PATIENTS SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO DO WHAT THEY CAN FOR THEMSELVES AND SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN DAILY ACTIVITIES AS FULLY AS POSSIBLE.

WHERE CAN YOU GET MORE INFORMATION?

IN ADDITION TO CONSULTING THE PATIENT'S PHYSICIAN, YOU CAN GET INFORMATION FROM LOCAL HOSPITALS AND CANCER CLINICS. YOU CAN GO TO THE PUBLIC LIBRARY AND LOOK UP BOOKS AND ARTICLES ON CANCER AND CAREGIVING. YOU CAN SEARCH THE INTERNET. THE AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY PROVIDES FREE INFORMATION AND INFORMATION ABOUT SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES IN LOCAL AREAS. CALL 1-800-ACS-2345.

AND PLEASE, TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

CAREGIVERS CAN BECOME PHYSICALLY EXHAUSTED AND EMOTIONALLY DRAINED. YOUR LOVED ONE'S WELL-BEING DEPENDS ON YOUR OWN WELL BEING. TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF IS ONE OF YOUR PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES. YOU SHOULD:

- ASK FOR HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT. CALL ON FAMILY MEMBERS, FRIENDS AND SUPPORT SERVICES TO ASSIST YOU IN CARING FOR THE PATIENT AND HANDLING HOUSEHOLD CHORES.
- KEEP IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH THE DOCTOR AND NURSES. GO TO THE APPOINTMENTS. ASK QUESTIONS AND REQUEST THAT THE DOCTOR CLARIFY THE ANSWERS IF YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND THEM AT FIRST.
- MAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF EVERY DAY. DO THINGS THAT TAKE YOU AWAY FROM THE ROUTINES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CARE.

- IF LONG-TERM, ARRANGE FOR EXTENDED PERIODS OF RELIEF. TAKE A VACATION.
- CHOOSE DESIGNATED LISTENERS. PEOPLE WHO ARE WILLING TO LISTEN TO YOUR PROBLEMS CAN GIVE YOU COMFORT, INSIGHT, AND SUPPORT.
- RELY ON EXPERT HELP: HOME HEALTH SERVICES, PSYCHOLOGISTS, COUNSELORS OR LEGAL, FINANCIAL AND INSURANCE SPECIALISTS.
- MAINTAIN A POSITIVE ATTITUDE, FOR YOURSELF AND YOUR LOVED ONE.