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In the field of care giving, in any setting, whether it be hospital, nursing home, assisted living, home care, medical clinics, etc., we see the impact daily of being a family caregiver.

Folks who have chosen to care for their family member, whether it be mom, dad, grandma or grandpa, disabled child or spouse, hats off to you!

While this is, for the most part, a precious time spent with someone you love, it can also be very wearing and challenging. It is so important that as a caregiver you learn to take care of yourself as well.

Being medical providers in the life of these precious caregivers, we often see the impact it has on them: emotionally, physically, spiritually and financially. In this article, I would like to discuss these in more detail.

Emotionally

The emotional impact of being a caregiver can be such a mix of feelings that the caregiver may not even be able to differentiate them all.

There is an obvious love for the person they are caring for, even a family connection, but that can begin to contradict itself with feelings of being overwhelmed, exhausted and eventually even angry and resentful.

There is so much demand on a daily basis, and maybe even through the nights as well, making it difficult to get appropriate rest.

Emotionally, this can become very overwhelming and exhausting. When a caregiver reaches this point, it is time for some respite, which means taking a break, letting someone else care for the person for a time, to allow the caregiver some time to regain the stamina to continue.

I think that is why it is important to take these 'periods of respite time' on a regular basis, so that you don't reach these breaking points.

Physically

The physical demands of being a caregiver obviously vary with the needs of the person being cared for, and can be light or very demanding.

We often see caregivers who end up with back problems from the heavy demands of being a caregiver. We are also seeing more mechanical lifts in place to ease the physical demands of lifting and repositioning. I would certainly recommend these systems being put in place.

As discussed earlier, the lack of adequate sleep for the caregiver not only impacts them emotionally, but physically we can only go without adequate sleep for so long without it impacting our health. Then we reach the point where we aren't good for anyone.

So make sure to get adequate rest. If there isn't someone to provide respite, then make sure to rest when the person you are caring for is resting.

Spiritually

Spiritually, the demands can really take a toll on a caregiver. The need to take care of yourself spiritually is so important. It seems that when we are in balance in our minds and hearts, it makes it possible to handle the events of each day.

When this balance is off, then so are we and what we can tolerate. Each person is unique in how they have to find this balance, whether it be time taken away by themselves, even in small increments of time. It may be having respite time to attend church each Sunday, or a Bible study.

I recently was a guest at a luncheon at the governor's mansion. Among the guests, were family caregivers. There was a speaker named Marilyn Schiefen, who spoke of the toils and gifts of care giving. She said that in her visits with family care givers, she had heard them express the feeling that they were 'stuck in a hole', and no matter what prescriptions or orders were thrown at them, they could not ever get out of that hole.

One of the struggles that caregivers face is the willingness to 'give up' care to a caregiver, thinking that they are the only ones who can care for that loved one appropriately—in a way, as a mother feels that no one can care for her children like she can.

If you are one of the blessed caregivers I have written about, hats off to you!

Remember to take care of yourself by finding the right amount of respite time and seeking to find what it takes for you to continue caring for your loved one without wearing yourself down.

Don't be afraid to ask for assistance. And take stock in the fact that others can care for your loved one enough, and while it may not be the same, it will be enough.

