

National Caregiver Month

Each November is National Caregiver Month. This is a time to recognize the millions of family caregivers across the nation and reflect on ways that healthcare organizations and individuals can help to support these caregivers. There are over 45 million caregivers in America. As baby boomers age and the older population increases along with life expectancy, more and more family members are pulled into the caregiver role. This role can be simply checking on a loved one regularly and assisting with medication or doctor appointments to full-time care giving. As healthcare providers, we interact daily with caregivers, some new to the role of care giving and some who have managed this role for some time. Healthcare has a responsibility to help support these caregivers through training, education, and resources. In rehabilitation, we must move beyond the quick one time training to detailed, thorough education provided with empathy and encouragement. Healthcare workers need to acknowledge the caregiver role and the difficulty and isolation that can accompany this role.

Over 50% of caregivers experience significant depression, often brought on by loneliness, isolation, poor nutrition, and lack of exercise among other contributors. Care giving takes a toll on the individual's physical, social, and emotional health. To take care of our patients, we also need to take care of their caregivers. We can connect them with resources and provide information on how to take care of their health and wellness needs. We need to help empower caregivers, both those who have been doing the role for a period of time and those new to the role, to better manage their lives.

Many situations arise in our daily lives where we may interact with:

- The patient who requires caregiver services
- The caregiver who is now a patient and unable to continue their duties either temporarily or permanently
- The family member or friend who is new to the caregiver role
- The family or friend who is an experienced caregiver
- The employee who is also a caregiver
- The co-worker, friend, or neighbor who is a caregiver

What can healthcare providers, fellow employees, supervisors, and friends do:

- Recognize and acknowledge the situation. Don't dismiss the caregiver's feelings and needs. Listen!
- Encourage the caregiver to seek help and accept help
- Provide resources
- Be an advocate for caregiver needs
- Share ideas to improve the quality of life for the caregiver

Ideas for caregivers can include:

- Making lists, prioritizing, and re-prioritizing the lists. These lists can include a contact list with names, phone numbers, and emails; lists of daily activities; lists of needs, and medication lists.
- Get organized. Have a daily agenda / plan. Have a working calendar. Organize the environment for ease in accessing needed items and to increase safety.
- Encourage the caregiver to take care of their health needs. Get enough sleep. Eat well. Find time to exercise.
- Find respite time to spend with friends or to watch a movie or TV show.
- Learn to say yes to help when it is offered.
- Don't neglect your own family
- Join a support group

Fast Facts Friday



There are many organizations which can provide assistance, education, and resources. Some of these include:

- Caregiver Action Network CAN www.caregiveraction.org
- Family Caregiver Alliance FCA <https://www.caregiver.org>
- AARP www.aarp.org/caregiving
- American Society on Aging www.asaging.org
- Care Connection AARP and United Healthcare <https://www.careconnection.aarp.org>
- National Association of Area Agencies on Aging www.n4a.org
- Solutions for Caregivers www.uhcforcaregivers.com
- National Council on Aging <https://ncoa.org>
- CINC - a mobile app to connect caregivers to other caregivers. You can download the app from the app store

These and other organizations can provide:

- Online support groups, locations for local support groups,
- Disease specific support groups
- Education and training online, through webinars, and on location
- Information on respite services
- Behavioral management ideas
- Information on technology support
- Telehealth services
- Newsletters
- Advocacy groups
- Diet, nutrition, and exercise needs
- LGBT needs
- And much more

Consider ways your organization or you as an individual can show support to caregivers you know this month.

Ideas can include:

- Write Thank you notes or inspirational notes
- Provide small gift bags (even consider asking retail stores to contribute gift cards)
- Host a brunch or luncheon in their honor
- Post caregiver information throughout your organization
- Sponsor a caregiver appreciation day working with other members of the community to provide small appreciation gifts, chair massages, manicures, facials, etc to pamper the caregivers.

**NATIONAL
FAMILY CAREGIVERS
MONTH
November 2017**

