

# CANCER AND THE CAREGIVER

## THE IMPORTANCE OF A CAREGIVER

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. As hospital stays become shorter, help at home becomes more important than ever.



## DEFINING THE CAREGIVER'S ROLE WORKING WITH A CANCER PATIENT

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 role. 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 healthcare professionals.

## 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 can enrich family relationships. It can help you understand and appreciate what is truly important in your life.

## CAREGIVING INVOLVES BOTH STRESSES AND REWARDS

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.

## INFORMED CARE IS EFFECTIVE CARE

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 and make note of important information. By communicating directly with the healthcare professionals, you can find out about your loved one's specific needs and how to recognize and manage symptoms. The healthcare professionals can also help you identify resources, such as home healthcare 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 for your loved one's.



## TIPS FOR TAKING 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.

- Ask for help from family members and friends when you need it — don't try to do everything yourself.
- If care is long term, arrange for extended periods of relief — take a vacation.
- Make time for yourself every day — try to do things that break your routine.
- Talk to friends who are willing to listen — it can give you comfort, insight and support to share your problems with others.
- Rely on expert help — home health services, psychologists, counselors or legal, financial and insurance specialists.
- Maintain a positive attitude — for yourself and for your loved one.

## TIPS FOR THE PATIENT

When you have cancer, everyone you love experiences the effects of cancer, too. Although you are the person going through cancer and treatments, those who love you will no doubt be affected emotionally. It may be a difficult time for them as well. Let others help you.

- Ask for help when you feel overwhelmed — speak up if you need help with chores, errands, or meal preparation.
- Be specific about your needs — “pick up my mail; water my plants; can you drive me to my appointment?”
- Share information and let others get involved — ask someone to come with you to your appointments.
- Be honest — if you're too tired for company or you just want someone to sit with you and hold your hand, tell them.



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