



Resources for family caregivers: Part II

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PORT ST. LUCIE ? At the beginning of my last article about family caregivers I asked three questions but only answered one of them.

That article discussed legal and financial resources that are available and how to tap into them. That article was published on Aug. 6.

This article will direct itself toward answering another question posed in the first article, to wit: are you worried about how long you will be able to survive meeting all the demands placed upon you?

The recurring theme expressed by almost all of the families we meet with on a daily basis is that the patient wants to stay in the home and never wants to be a resident of an assisted living or skilled nursing facility.

Almost uniformly, the caregiver is totally committed to fulfilling that desire, and, in some cases has made a promise to the patient. But as the needs of the patient increase with the progression of disease and infirmity, the ability of the caregiver to meet those needs is oftentimes inadequate.

For example, an elderly 100-pound caregiver spouse in most situations is not physically capable of safely transferring a 200 pound patient from bed to wheelchair to bath.

As the caregiver continues to attempt to fulfill their promise in terms of the daily activities with which the spouse needs help, such as meal preparation, dressing, bathing, managing medications, and transportation the job becomes increasingly difficult.

In addition the caregiver is responsible for 100 percent of the activities required to maintain the household. Continuing down this pathway without getting adequate assistance is going to lead to caregiver burnout and the inability of the caregiver to continue to meet the needs of the patient.

Unfortunately, the statistics for the caregiver spouse are not good. Another illustration of the problem of caregiver denial and burnout is mentioned on every commercial passenger airline safety indoctrination: if you are traveling with somebody who need your assistance, if the oxygen mask comes down, put it on yourself first ? otherwise you will lose consciousness in 17 seconds and will be of no help at all to the person who needs your care.

Obviously the translation is that the caregiver needs to very carefully monitor their own well-being to ensure that they will be able to continue to be of assistance to the patient/spouse.

The important message of this article is to suggest that family caregivers should reach out for help.

That help might be provided by other family members, which of course, is wonderful if that is available and possible. Otherwise, the caregiver needs to reach out for help from the community. The most important thing to keep in mind is that there are resources available and to keep asking until you get the help you need.

One resource is the Area Agency on Aging and specifically "Your Aging and Disability Resource Center," the toll-free number for which is 1-866-684-5885. Counselors are available at that help line number to connect you with other resources, including adult day care, home delivered meals, respite care, caregiver support, personal care, prescription savings, electric bill assistance, and similar programs.

The aging resource center can also connect you with SHINE (serving health insurance needs of elders) for counseling and assistance with Medicare, Medicaid and other health insurance questions. Your local county branch of the Council on Aging can also connect you with these types of resources.

In circumstances where a patient is suffering from Alzheimer's or other dementias, Alzheimer's Association can provide advice as well as caregiver support groups. Another tremendous resource available for families experiencing the effects of Alzheimer's is Alzheimer's Community Care (ACC). ACC maintains family nurse consultants that can be available for patient assessments, family counseling and advice as to the best treatment modalities.

ACC also operates adult day care centers in Palm Beach, Martin, and St. Lucie counties which can be excellent sources of respite for the caregiver as well as disease appropriate stimulation and activities for the patient.

Locator bracelets or similar devices are also available for families where the patient is in the wandering stage of Alzheimer's to provide an element of safety for a patient who leaves the residence and might otherwise be lost.

In addition, almost all of the home health care companies serving the treasure coast would welcome your call and be able to give you an assessment and an estimate as to ways they can assist you in your caregiving job.

Similarly, almost every adult caregiving facility provides an opportunity for respite for the caregiver. Getting assistance from a home health care company or assisted living facility for even short periods of time can allow a burned-out caregiver a chance to refresh themselves and take care of their own needs. Recent advertisements that I have seen in the newspaper offer seven nights of respite for \$350.

This is a chance for a caregiver to be able to take a vacation or leave town for an important family matter with the assurance that their loved one is in a safe and caring environment. In short, one of the most important jobs of the caregiver is to always be mindful of what needs to be done to keep the caregiver functioning in a way that will be of benefit to the patient.

There is help available, just reach out and ask for it. Our law firm, and I'm sure many others, including almost any entity offering service to seniors, would welcome calls for help ? we are acquainted with many of our fellow workers in the senior health care industry and will be glad to talk to you and give you referrals to other sources of help.

To read part one of this family caregiver series and other related articles, please visit The Estate Trust & Elder Law Firm's website at www.etelf.com and refer to the In-The-News tab or you may call the office at 772-878-7271 to request copies of articles.

Other article topics include revocable living trusts, powers of attorney, "I love you" wills for elderly married couples, improved wartime Pension for Veterans and surviving spouses, and nonlawyer Medicaid/VA planners.

You may also call the office to request a free copy of a DVD, which was recorded at the firm's recent estate and long-term care planning seminar on Oct. 15.

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