

Caregiver Burnout: What Is It? How Do I Prevent It?

**Satellite Conference and Live Webcast
Wednesday, December 5, 2012
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Central Time**

**Produced by the Alabama Department of Public Health
Video Communications and Distance Learning Division**

Faculty

**Carolyn O'Bryan-Miller, LCSW, PIP
Home Health Social Work Consultant**

**Shirley Offutt, BSN, RN
Nurse Education Consultant**

**Bureau of Home and
Community Services
Alabama Department of Public Health**

Caregivers

- **More than 44 million Americans (21% of the population) provide unpaid care to an elderly or disabled person**
- **Informal caregivers provide 80% of the long-term care in the U.S.**
- **61% of caregivers are women**
- **Most caregivers are middle-aged**

Caregivers

- **13% of caregivers are aged 65 years or older**
- **59% of informal caregivers have jobs in addition to caring for another person**
- **More than half of employed women caregivers have made changes at work due to demands of caring for someone else**

Caregiver Burnout

- **A state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion that may be accompanied by a change in attitude**
 - **From positive and caring, to negative and unconcerned**

Caregiver Burnout

- **Burnout can occur when caregivers don't get the help they need, or if they try to do more than they are able either physically or financially**

Caregiver Burnout

- Isn't like a cold
- You don't always notice it when you are in its clutches
- Very much like Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome, the symptoms of burnout can begin surfacing months after a traumatic episode

Caregiver Burnout

- Caregivers who are "burned out" may experience fatigue, stress, anxiety, and depression
- Many caregivers also feel guilty if they spend time on themselves rather than on their ill or elderly loved ones

Caregiver Burnout

- Caregivers often are so busy caring for others that they tend to neglect their own emotional, physical, and spiritual health
- The demands on a caregiver's body, mind, and emotions can easily seem overwhelming
 - Leads to fatigue / hopelessness, and ultimately, burnout

Factors that Lead to Caregiver Burnout

- Role confusion
 - Many people are confused when thrust into the role of caregiver
 - It can be difficult for a person to separate her role as caregiver from her role as spouse, lover, child, friend, etc.

Factors that Lead to Caregiver Burnout

- Unrealistic expectations
 - Many caregivers expect their involvement to have positive effect on health and happiness of patient
 - This may be unrealistic for patients suffering from a progressive disease, such as Parkinson's or Alzheimer's

Factors that Lead to Caregiver Burnout

- Lack of control
 - Many caregivers become frustrated by a lack of money, resources, and skills to effectively plan, manage, and organize their loved one's care

Factors that Lead to Caregiver Burnout

- **Unreasonable demands**
 - Some caregivers place unreasonable burdens upon themselves, in part because they see providing care as their exclusive responsibility

Factors that Lead to Caregiver Burnout

- **Other factors**
 - Many caregivers cannot recognize when they are suffering burnout and eventually they cannot function effectively
 - They may even become sick themselves

Signs and Symptoms of Caregiver Burnout

- **Signs that may point to caregiver “burnout” may be:**
 - Excessive use of alcohol, medications, or sleeping pills
 - Appetite changes
 - Eating too much or too little

Signs and Symptoms of Caregiver Burnout

- Depression, hopelessness, feelings of alienation, lack of energy to do new things
- Thoughts of death
- Losing control physically or emotionally

Signs and Symptoms of Caregiver Burnout

- Neglecting or treating roughly the person for whom you are caring
- Trouble falling asleep or staying asleep
- Difficulty concentrating, missing appointments

Signs and Symptoms of Caregiver Burnout

- Decreasing interest in work and decreased work production
- Withdrawal from social contacts
- Feelings of helplessness

How to Relieve Stress

- **Remind the caregiver that they are human and should not feel guilty for being less than perfect**
 - **We all lose patience and become fatigued**
- **Set realistic goals**
- **Ask family members for help**
 - **Physically and financially**

Taking Care of Themselves

- **Exercise**
- **Get adequate rest**
- **Attend to medical needs**
- **Eat a healthy diet**
- **Learn to say no to additional requests of time**

Taking Time for Themselves

- **Pencil in at least 15 minutes a day to do something they enjoy**
- **Create a personal space in the home just for themselves**
- **Look for shortcuts and other streamlining efficiencies such as paying bills online, completing hardest tasks first, and preparing more than one meal at a time**

Taking Time for Themselves

- **Unplug**
 - **Although electronic gadgets assist us in our lives, they can also be time consuming**
- **Buy time if they can afford it:**
 - **Housekeeper, yard man, professional caregivers**

Technology to Assist Caregivers

- **Medical Alert Systems**
- **Granny Cams**
 - **Web based cameras installed in the home that record any detected motion**
 - **Example: Liveline - cost of \$299 and no monthly fee**

Technology to Assist Caregivers

- **Personal Emergency Response System (Webcore)**
 - **Device worn similar to Lifeline but more sophisticated:**
 - **Can detect unusual movements such as falls and alert caregivers**
 - **Blue tooth and GPS can detect where the person is**

Technology to Assist Caregivers

- Ability to send text messages or voice messages to the device
- Remind the person to wear the device
- Equipment cost: \$199
- Monthly fee: \$50

Technology to Assist Caregivers

- Combination of computer telemonitoring / cameras
 - Example: Adaptive Home through Rescare
 - Uses sensors to track a person's movement around the home

Technology to Assist Caregivers

- Sensors around bed can indicate when the person gets up or goes to bed
- Track when the refrigerator is opened
- Daily contact with Rescare through Skype

Tips for Long Distance Caregivers

- Caregivers should get to know the patient's neighbors, mail carrier, and friends
- Create a list of medical issues / medications, doctor's names, and legal documents in case they are needed in an emergency

Tips for Long Distance Caregivers

- Keep a copy of the patient's Yellow Pages
- Set up professional caregiving services (or recruit friends and family) to provide assistance for tasks such as grocery shopping, medication reminders, running errands, and meal preparation

Long Range Planning

- Making plans for when a patient can no longer care for themselves or make their own decisions
- Important to plan early!

Long Range Planning

- **Living Wills**
- **Durable Power of Attorney**
- **Life Insurance**
- **Funeral Arrangements**
- **DNR Orders**

References

- <http://women.webmd.com/caregiver-recognizing-burnout>
- http://www.caregiver.com/articles/caregiver/caregiver_burnout.htm
- http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Caregiver/Responsibilities/SignsofCaregiverBurnout/Signs-of-CaregiverBurnout_UCM_301831_Article.jsp

Links for Caregivers

- <http://www.caregiverstress.com>
- <http://www.medicare.gov/caregivers/>
- <http://www.caregivershome.com/>