

Share the care

Time to honor family caregivers, give them respite

Take the time to thank the family caregivers you know this Thanksgiving.

Rosalyn Carter said it best: "There are only four kinds of people in the world — those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers, those who will be caregivers and those who will need caregivers."

The backbone of our country's long-term, home-based, and community-based care systems is the family caregiver. That fact has been recognized on a national level since 1994, when the National Family Caregivers Association held a National Family Caregivers Week. Since 1997, when President Clinton signed the first proclamation recognizing November as National Family Caregivers Month, U.S. presidents have followed suit each year.

The purpose of recognizing family caregivers is to draw attention to the many challenges facing them, to advocate for stronger public policy to address family caregiving issues, and to raise awareness about community programs that support family caregivers.

There are more than 65 million American family members caring for their loved ones. This number is up considerably from 2004, when it was reported that 50 million Americans were caring for their loved ones, and this number will continue to grow as the baby boomers begin to turn 65 on Jan. 1, 2011.

Family caregivers provide an unlimited amount of services such as assisting with ambulation, personal hygiene, cooking, medication reminders and doctor's appointments, as well as providing emotional support, every day around the clock, and that's just to name a few.

Bob Roth



It can be an extremely difficult responsibility for an adult child, who has a full-time job and in many cases cares for children of his or her own, to also care for their mom or dad at the same time.

Genworth Financial ran a television campaign last year depicting the family caregivers as everyday heroes. The campaign went something like this: Without a cape, without a mask, without a sidekick, or special suit, can you still recognize a hero? This Thanksgiving, join us in recognizing family caregivers nationally for keeping the promise to be there for their aging or infirm family members and friends.

Make sure that this Thanksgiving if you see a friend, a loved one or a neighbor in the role of being a family caregiver, offer to "share the care." By

offering to share the care with a family caregiver, you will enable that caregiver to get the rest, or respite, needed so that individual can be a better caregiver to his or her loved one.

At the very least, take the opportunity to reach out to a family caregiver by sending a card of appreciation or a bouquet of flowers to brighten up a family caregiver's day.

While November may be the official month to recognize an individual's act as a family caregiver, every month and every day is one in which they make a difference.

We send a special thank you to all the heroes and heroines out there every day. As President Barack Obama said in his last address to the National Family Caregivers Association, "The true strength of the American family finds its roots in an unwavering commitment to care for one another."

Finally, when you are sitting at the Thanksgiving table this year with you family, look around the table and recognize the family members that are helping fellow family members with everyday activities of daily living. Make a point in recognizing their commitment to caring for their loved one, but also remind them that they can "share the care."

Happy Thanksgiving.

Bob Roth is the managing partner of Cypress HomeCare Solutions. Visit cypresshomecare.com or call 602-264-8009.

Help ailing kin enjoy holidays

For all the joy they bring, the holidays can also be a stressful time — especially for anyone facing illness, injury or hospitalization, or for anyone taking care of an ill or hospitalized loved one. If you know someone in that situation, you may feel awkward about sharing your holiday spirit when your friend, family member or co-worker is dealing with such serious issues.

But rest assured, it's still important and valuable for you to show your support and share your positive attitude with those who may be facing a less-than-happy season because of health issues. Whether by just staying in touch or providing practical assistance that your friend or loved one needs, you can help ease holiday stress for someone who is ill or who is caring for a sick person.

"Facing a significant health challenge is never easy, but it can be especially difficult during the holiday season," says Sona Mehring, founder of CaringBridge, an online service that helps people create and maintain websites for ill loved ones. "Caregivers and patients can be so caught up by the demands of the illness that other needs and priorities fall by the wayside. They may need help dealing with the special demands of the

holidays, like shopping, decorating their homes and keeping in touch with people who want to know how they are doing."

Mehring offers some ideas for how you can help relieve holiday stress for anyone going through a health crisis:

- Get specific with your offer of help. Volunteer to do holiday errands or pick up some needed items when you do your own shopping. Often, these mundane concerns may take lower priority for anyone dealing with a significant health challenge.

- Make and deliver holiday treats to a caregiver or patient who may not have time to perform such tasks on his or her own. Simply providing a taste of seasonal foods — such as pumpkin pie for Thanksgiving or *sufganiyot* for Hanukkah — can help lift their spirits.

- Call on a handful of close friends to help decorate the person's home. Time constraints can hinder caregivers, and physical constraints may prevent a patient from doing their own decorating. This not only helps finish a major holiday project, it can also help patients and caregivers get into the spirit of the season.

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