

November 16, 2007

Let's thank family caregivers

Every November, the president of the United States proclaims November to be National Family Caregivers Month. It is designated as a time every year to thank, support, educate and celebrate the more than 60 million family caregivers across the country currently providing an estimated \$306 billion in "free" caregiving services.

It is hard to believe that more than 50 million people in the United States are caring for loved ones 18 years of age or older. Not to mention that there are at least another 10 million people caring for loved ones with special needs who are younger than 18. That's at least 60 million people — nearly 20 percent of the total U.S. population. So if you count yourself as one of these 60 million Americans, you definitely are not alone.

Being a family caregiver can be a very lonely endeavor, especially if you have little or no chance for social interaction with others. But at some point in the not-too-distant future, virtually every family in America will be involved in some form of family care-giving.

Experts predict that the nation will need 1 million more home-care workers by 2017 and as many as 3 million more by 2030, when all of the expected 78 million surviving baby boomers will be older than 65. Right now there are only about 1 million aides. These nonmedical home-care aides come into the homes of the disabled or older adults and help with bathing, dressing, meal preparation and everyday chores.

Unlike medical home health aides, they don't do physical therapy or handle medications. Many work through home-care agencies, while others work directly for families. Most seniors pay out of pocket or tap their long-term-care insurance policies for the in-home care, but some on lower incomes qualify for help from Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) or the Arizona Long Term Care System

(ALTC) providers of our state. The law of supply and demand has

Bob Roth



never been more apparent than in the growing demand for home care. Demand is growing because the number of individuals 65 and older in the U.S. is expected to double in the next 25 years, and many seniors prefer to stay at home rather than move to a nursing home. Also, more families are relying on paid caregivers because more women work than in previous generations and can't attend to elderly parents during the day. Meanwhile, the traditional labor pool for home-care workers will barely increase. Immigrants will answer some of the demand, but the women who typically went to work as caregivers now have better-paying, less demanding options in other fields.

As we observe National Family Caregivers Month, we honor those family caregivers who take time out of their lives to improve the lives of family and friends. Family caregivers exemplify the true spirit of compassion by providing

support to their loved ones and assisting them with their everyday activities and special needs. These selfless people must often make great personal sacrifices to maintain the care and support their family and friends require.

It is at this time that we want to remind caregivers to share the responsibilities. It is also a good time for others who are not caregivers to think about helping the caregivers they know, or even to consider a career as a caregiver.

We all have a lot on our plate with our own lives, but know that by reaching out and letting someone know that you are there to help and listen, you are taking a good first step. The second step is not to wait for a caregiver to ask for help, but to offer your assistance and insist on it.

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

Thankful for family caregivers

Editor:

I salute Jewish News for publishing Bob Roth's excellent article "Let's thank family caregivers" (Jewish News, Nov. 16). Family caregivers truly are unsung heroes of our society. In doing what they do — taking care of a relative or neighbor — and doing it without being paid to do so, they save the taxpayers billions of dollars.

I urge caregivers also to remember, and to get, respite care. Many family caregivers predecease their care-recipients. Too many caregivers burn out and then are gone. Respite care is vital — truly necessary to the maintenance of life.

We all must be vigilant that the family caregivers among us (especially when they are us) get adequate respite time off in order to maintain their own health and well-being.

The size, and the amount, of the mitzvot these unsung heroes perform is something we can document in dollar terms, but in human terms it is inestimable.

Bob Rosenberg
Phoenix