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Time to thank family caregivers

It is not a provocative issue such as gay marriage or illegal immigration, yet the importance of what we do — or don't do — regarding the health and care needs of our seniors may have more economic, physical and moral relevance for families than any other problem before us.

Let's face it: We simply don't plan for old age — either individually or as a society. Society is more focused on youth.

Media coverage of senior care means — more often than not — a story about something bad happening at a nursing home. Scary stuff, but not indicative of the thankless care thousands provide our families across our state every day.

Alternately, we see cute video clips of seniors when they reach 100 with little mention of the daily lives preceding that century mark.

The countless heroes are the caregivers who provide the care for our elderly.

Enough is not done to recognize these heroes. This past month of November, we celebrated National Caregivers Month. With more than 50 million Americans caring for family members who are chronically ill, disabled or aging, we need to give them the recognition and support that they so desperately deserve.

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.

When we observe National Family Caregivers Month, we honor family caregivers who take time out of their lives to improve the lives of family and friends. Their efforts demonstrate the best of the American spirit.

We cannot ignore the facts. An increasing number of us will be forced to live with disabilities, and senior care is expensive. By 2030, the number of Arizonans age 65 or older will have more than doubled. Most assisted-living and nursing options cost more than \$60,000 a year — unaffordable to the majority. Long-term-care insurance is one answer, but just 10 percent nationally have purchased it.

So what do we do?

Family caregiving is the immediate, most cost-effective solution. We cannot lose sight of the fact that it is also

a part of our heritage. In my family, my grandmother cared for her mother and when her mother passed, years later she cared for her brother.

How can we help?

It is important that we make certain that caregivers take care of themselves. To be a caregiver you have to be healthy. To be healthy, you have to get rest and time off from your responsibilities. If you know someone that is a caregiver, offer him or her some respite time. Offer

to help the caregiver do some of their tasks, such as housekeeping, shopping, preparing a meal or even driving to doctor's appointments.

According to a study conducted in 2004 by the National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP:

- 75 percent of caregivers believed that they had no choice in taking on the caregiving responsibilities
- 50 percent wanted someone to talk to who could identify tasks that other family members or friends could do
- 50 percent of the respondents said they didn't have enough time to take care of themselves

This study also reported that among those caregivers who said they were in fair to poor health, an alarming 91 percent of the caregivers surveyed are suffering from depression.

It is time to remind caregivers to share the responsibilities, as well as a time for others to think about helping the caregivers they know. We all have a lot on our plate with our own lives, but reaching out and letting someone know that you are there to help and listen is a good first step. The second step is to not 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, which provides knowledgeable and experienced caregivers to clients who wish to stay in their own home or are in need of compassionate care anywhere. For more information, visit www.cypresshomecare.com or call 602-264-8009.



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