

# AGING TODAY

## Family Caregivers - The Heroes Among Us



By Bob Roth, Managing Partner of Cypress HomeCare Solutions

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There are so many months dedicated to raising awareness about important health issues that it is hard to keep track of all of them. Every year there seems to be a new health issue that is being added to a specific month. While there are many important health issues that are worthy of a monthly dedication, in my mind there is no more important health observation/awareness month than National Family Caregiving day which is celebrated every year during the month of November. Celebration is a good description of what we as a community and nation should be doing for these selfless individuals that give up their lives to assist their loved ones to be able to stay at home.

So why does it stand out for me? It's because it affects so many of us, and there are so many that live among us that don't see themselves as a caregiver. The statistics are overwhelming. According to estimates from the National Alliance for Caregiving, during the past year, 65.7 million Americans (or 29 percent of the adult U.S. adult population involving 31 percent of all U.S. households) served as family caregivers for an ill or disabled relative.

The backbone of our country's long-term, home-based, and community-based care systems is the Family Caregiver. Since 1994 the month of November is recognized as National Family Caregivers Month. In 1997, President Clinton signed the first proclamation recognizing November as National Family Caregivers Month this has been proclaimed by an American President annually ever since. The purpose of recognizing Family Caregivers is to draw attention to the many challenges facing family caregivers, advocate for stronger public policy to address family caregiving issues and raise awareness about community programs that support family caregivers.

These unsung heroes, are giving of themselves and are providing billions of dollars' worth of caregiving services each year, they are dramatically reducing the demands that are placed on our long-term care system and contribute to improving the quality of life of their loved ones."

According to AARP the average family caregiver is someone 50+ are 50.3 years old, and most are female (60%). The majority (86%) of 50+ caregivers provide care for a relative, 47% care for

a parent or parent-in-law. One in 10 cares for a spouse. One in four caregivers of someone 50+ is providing care to the oldest-old, those who are ages 85 or older. On average, 50+ caregivers' recipients are 74.7 years old.

Being a caregiver can be both physically and emotionally exhausting. If you are taking care of a loved one, it is important to remember to recharge your batteries. Caregiving can also lead to additional pressures, such as financial strain, family conflict, and social withdrawal. Over time, caregiver stress can lead to burnout.

So, this Thanksgiving join us in recognizing Family Caregivers nationally for keeping the promise to be there for their aging 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 the Family Caregiver you will enable the Caregiver to get the rest "respite" so that they can be a better caregiver to their 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.

Thank you Family Caregivers.