

Federal Women's Program (FWP) Balancing Work and Family Series
Providing Family Care

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This and future articles on topics related to “Balancing Work and Family” are being provided to employees as a result of feedback received during the FY08 FWP Facilitated Networking Sessions.

Most of us, at some point in our lives, will need to provide family care. This may include serving as the caregiver for an elderly or ill parent, an ill spouse or child. This “work” can be very fulfilling and rewarding, but also very difficult and stressful to balance with work and other commitments. Sometimes crisis hits and responsibility descends upon us suddenly, adding to the stress. Making it even more difficult is the fact that many caregivers do not see themselves as such, they consider it a family obligation. According to the Iowa Department of Elder Affairs, a caregiver is anyone that helps someone who cannot do or is limited from doing normal daily activities themselves. The caregiver role is complex and differs for everyone, depending on the needs of the person they are assisting.

Caregivers often are reluctant to use formal help. Providing care and support can result in consequences to the caregiver's physical and emotional well-being. Even the most self-sufficient people may need and will benefit from information and direct services to best meet the needs of the family member in need of care and the caregiver themselves. This article provides some of the formal resources available in Iowa for caregivers to seek assistance from.

According to a landmark study published in the New England Journal of Medicine, wives, daughters, and sisters are the primary caregivers for millions of terminally ill patients in this country. They often serve as the sole providers of an array of homemaking, transportation, nursing, and personal care needs. Also, less than 20% of patients receive paid caregiving services in addition to family assistance, and the proportion of assistance provided by non-family volunteers was negligible. There are definitely situations in which caring for a terminally ill family member may be too much and tips the balance making it overwhelming for the caregiver.

Below are some tips for caregivers, provided by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and Senior Solutions of America, Inc.:

- **Rest.** Don't let caregiving become your full time job. Use hospice services. Talk to a medical social worker about community resources that are available. Ask friends or other family members to take your place for a day or a half day every week. Do something for you during that time! That is not a time to run errands etc.
- **Communicate with other caregivers.** There are hundreds of caregiver support groups, some sponsored by hospitals and community centers.

The Internet has chat rooms, discussion groups and websites devoted solely to supporting caregivers.

- **Record the patient's life story.** Ask your loved one to talk about their life and record the conversation. Use a simple question and answer format in which you write out some questions in advance. Use short, open ended prompts, such as "What are your earliest childhood memories?"
- **Be aware of resources and opportunities through your employer.** Communicate with your supervisor and Human Resources to become knowledgeable about leave options and all resources you may need to access in order to balance caregiving and work. One important resource is the NRCS Employee Assistance Program (EAP), which helps employees by offering professional assistance including counseling and support related to family matters and dependent care. Do not be afraid or too proud to seize every opportunity. And, while you are providing care, make sure that is your priority. Do not allow yourself to be concerned with work while serving as a caregiver.
- **Take a deep breath.** All along the way, remember to pause from time to time and collect your thoughts. Clear your mind and relax. This will help you sustain your spirits and prevent you from sinking under the weight of caregiving burdens.
- **Gather the necessary information about your family member.** Make sure you know their birthdate, Social Security number, all medical providers, health insurance information and policy number (gain access to copies of policies and insurance card - front and back), copy of Medicare card if the patient is 65 or older, list of all medications, dates and results of recent medical tests and exams, and a complete medical history.
- **Call a family meeting.** Try to get as many family members as possible involved from the beginning. If possible, designate a person to be responsible for each task.
- **Determine legal tools and documents.** Find out if the family member in need of care has the proper legal tools and documents in place, including their will, Durable power of attorney for finances, Durable power of attorney for health care, and a living will.
- **Explore financial resources.** Determine assets and other resources of your loved one.
- **Explore community resources.** Find out about senior centers, adult day care services, home health agencies, meal delivery, and transportation services. Utilize these resources as needed to provide much needed assistance to you, as the caregiver. Even begin to identify assisted living facilities and other long term care options.
- **Consult with everybody and anybody.** Talk to friends, neighbors, acquaintances, and anyone experienced in being a caregiver. In reaching out, you will assemble a vast amount of information and will learn from others' experiences. It is also reassuring to know that others are or have experienced similar situations and you are not alone.

- **Talk to the patient.** Remember that the caregiver's role is to help the patient maintain as much control over their lives as feasible, not take it away. This includes allowing them to make their own decisions if possible. Be sure to consult with the patient, consider their desires, and truly respect them.
- **Make sure everyone on the caregiving team has information.** Make a list of emergency numbers, family contact numbers and other needed information and distribute to those who might need it. Family members should know how to locate legal, financial and medical documents. Make sure those that need access to the patient's home, have keys.
- **Take good notes.** When talking to doctors, lawyers, insurance company, government offices, and others, write down the date and name of the person you spoke with, along with the information they provide.
- **Acknowledge your feelings.** Be sure to acknowledge your feelings of loss, anger, shock and confusion. Allow yourself time to experience them. Write them down in a journal. Find a quiet corner and close your eyes. Take care of yourself too.

Resources available:

Area Agencies on Aging –

<http://www.state.ia.us/elderaffairs/aaa/aaacontact.html>

Elder Care Link (connects you with select eldercare and adult care providers in Iowa – <http://www.eldercarelink.com/Provider/Listing/AllCategories/Iowa/3>

http://www.eldercarelink.com/provider/listing/Adult_Care/Iowa/1

Family Caregiver Alliance – www.caregiver.org

Family Caregiver Resources –

<http://www.state.ia.us/elderaffairs/living/caregiver.html>

Family Caregiving – www.familycaregiving101.org

Iowa's Aging and Disability Resources – www.LifeLongLinks.org

Iowa Association of Area Agencies on Aging searchable website –

www.I4A.org

Local Hospice – see local telephone book

Long Distance Caregiving – www.caregiver.org (Click on Handbook for Long-Distance Caregiving)

National Alliance for Care Giving – <http://www.caregiving.org/>

National Association for Home Care and Hospice

<http://www.nahc.org/home.html>

National Caregivers Library – www.caregiverslibrary.org

Older Driver Safety Concerns – www.thehartford.com/talkwitholderdrivers

Telecaregiving Workshops for Family Caregivers Online – Family Caregiver Alliance at www.caregiver.org under Fact Sheets and Publications or at

<http://caregiver.org/caregiver/jsp/publications.jsp??nodeid=345&expandnodeid=1853>

USDA NRCS Employee Assistance Program (EAP) – The Sand Creek Group, Ltd., 1-888-243-5744 or <http://www.sandcreekeap.com/>