

BENJAMIN
ROSE
findings

A NEWSLETTER OF THE
MARGARET BLENKNER RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Winter 2005

When the Frustrations of Caregiving Lead to Harm

Family caregiving refers to help provided by kin to an older relative because of health problems, impairments, or general frailty. Caregiving may involve help with a wide range of tasks such as assisting with daily living activities, emotional support, health care, finances, and household chores.

Most family members want to help their elderly relatives and do so out of love,

Harm can occur without intent. Without realizing it, caregivers can be at risk for mistreating their relatives, or for neglecting themselves and their own needs.

Family members do not always choose to be caregivers. Caregiving is sometimes an unexpected responsibility that is added to an already busy schedule. Even when it is expected and when a family member really wants to help, caregiving can feel

Caregiving can be made more manageable by recognizing when it is becoming too hard

honor, and a sense of filial responsibility. Yet for some, caregiving can become physically and emotionally difficult, and at times overwhelming. While not everyone experiences these negative effects, they are not uncommon and are understandable in light of the added demands caregiving can place on everyday life.

Some caregivers are more vulnerable to negative effects because of problems or issues separate from helping their older relatives. These other problems or issues can add to caregivers' feeling overwhelmed or exhausted. This can lead to potentially harmful situations for themselves or the relatives for whom they care. For example, coping with caregiving can be especially difficult when caregivers have their own health or emotional problems such as depression, anxiety, arthritis, or diabetes.

Harm to the caregiver or relative receiving care can result from poor judgment, feelings of anger and frustration, tiredness, or having to do too many things at once.

like an uncontrollable situation. Although many aspects of caregiving cannot be changed, a person's reaction to stress can be controlled. For example, sometimes it is possible to get other family members to help more, so all the responsibility is not on one person. Also, there are professionals and organizations in the community who are experienced, understanding, and able to help. Caregiving can be made more manageable by recognizing when it is becoming too hard, or being aware of things that may trigger stress or frustration. It is important to know that caregivers do not have to go it alone, and that there are places in the community to call if assistance is needed.

Signs that stress is too much

Caregivers should be aware of their stress and recognize when things are beginning to feel too difficult. This is an important

Community Forum When the Frustrations of Caregiving Lead to Harm

Wednesday, April 20, 2005
8:30 to 11 a.m.
Kresge Room, Kethley House,
11900 Fairhill Road

Topics include:

- caregiver stress and strain
- strategies to reduce caregiving stress
- "red flags" of abuse or neglect
- reporting and investigating suspected abuse or neglect.

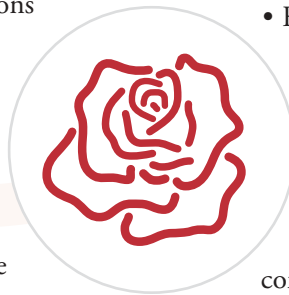
Registration is required and includes a continental breakfast. Students, staff, and caregiving families must register, but will be admitted at no charge. For professionals, the cost to attend is \$10. Registration is limited. Social work CEUs available.

To register, call 216.373.1674
or visit www.benrose.org

step in preventing the challenges of caregiving from becoming so bad that they lead to harm. If a caregiver often (several times a week) experiences any of the following, it may be a sign that stress is a problem.

- Often feeling downhearted, sad, or blue
- Having more physical pains than usual
- Feeling or becoming more isolated; not talking to or seeing other people
- Drinking more alcoholic beverages or taking more medications
- Feeling lots of pressure from the competing responsibilities of caring for an older relative and other work, or family responsibilities
- Frequently questioning whether the caregiver can continue to provide care
- Frequently arguing with other family members about having to provide care or feeling resentful about caregiving

Experiencing one or more of these feelings or behaviors may mean caregiving has reached the point where something has to change. It could be that the caregiver needs a temporary break from care responsibilities, or needs to find new



ways of coping with or relieving stress. Sometimes it means getting other family members or friends to help more or in different ways. It may be time to get help from professionals who are experienced with caregiving.

A number of service organizations, such as Benjamin Rose, assist with caregiving and its stresses. Some of these organizations specialize in issues related to caring for an older relative; other organizations help with all types of family issues. Services that may be helpful for caregivers to consider include home nursing or aide services, home chore services, adult day centers, respite services, counseling, care consultation, legal or financial consulta-

Warning signs

Harm or mistreatment of an older person can take many forms, particularly if physical or mental health problems require them to rely on other people for care. Here are a few examples of signs that may indicate neglect or abuse of an older person.

- Leaving him or her alone longer than is safe
- Not helping with medications even though assistance is needed
- Using money or property improperly
- Yelling, swearing, or threatening
- Threatening nursing home placement
- Giving care in a rough way
- Hitting or physically lashing out

tion, support groups, and caregiver training and educational programs.

Caregivers under stress may want to discuss the situation with their doctors or the doctors of the relatives for whom they care. It may be helpful to make a list of troubling feelings or issues that can be shared with a doctor.

Recognizing stress triggers

Studies by researchers at Benjamin Rose's Margaret Blenkner Research Institute, as well as many other researchers, have identified a number of behaviors that are especially difficult or upsetting for caregivers – such as keeping the caregiver up at night; being suspicious or accusatory of the caregiver; or repeating the same thing over and over again. Though they may be caused by illness, when these behaviors occur, they can trigger extra stress or strain, and could lead to a harmful situation.

Although they do not happen in all or even most situations, some problem behaviors are related to Alzheimer's disease or some other type of dementia. Caregiving for someone with Alzheimer's disease or dementia is more difficult because of these types of behaviors. Caregiving for older adults with dementia also may require constant supervision, which can become exhausting. Caregivers should recognize that behavior problems can be the results of the disease, brain damage, frustration, fear, fatigue, or

physical illness. Since they may not be within the person's control, it can be important to discuss problem behaviors with other experienced caregivers or professionals. There are ways of coping and managing these symptoms that can help reduce tension.

Reporting elder abuse or neglect

If there is cause to believe that harm is occurring to an older person, a referral may be made to your county's department of Adult Protective Services. Be prepared to give the older person's name and address and reasons why you are concerned. Ohio laws require county departments of Adult Protective Services to investigate reports of mistreatment of adults 60 years of age and older. A social worker will meet with the older person to assess his or her safety. The goal is to improve the person's health and safety, not to punish. Adult Protective Services staff also may help by connecting older adults and their caregivers to a variety of home, support, and community resources.

For more information about Adult Protective Services, call:

- (440) 998-1110 (Ashtabula County)
- (216) 420-6700 (Cuyahoga County)
- (440) 285-9141 (Geauga County)
- (440) 350-4000 (Lake County)
- (440) 323-5726 (Lorain County)
- (330) 722-9283 (Medina County)

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