

The Role of Caregiver

There really is not a textbook, no blueprint, and no guide on how to be a caregiver. This is true despite the fact that for Alzheimer's disease alone, there are nearly 15 million caregivers and that number will rise dramatically in the next 25 years. Consider all the caregivers for loved ones suffering the different forms of illness and it is easy to appreciate how important the role of caregiver is in our society.

It is true that caregivers are a special group. They are patient, compassionate, caring people who place the needs of others in front of their own. We all agree that these are highly admirable qualities, but it is also true that over time such qualities can be detrimental to one's own health. It is indeed common for caregivers to be so focused on their role of caring for another that their own health and wellbeing gets neglected. We know that at least 33% of caregivers suffer depression, while others experience sleep disorder, anxiety, lost wages and reduced time spent at work.

Caregivers are human beings and it is normal for feelings of guilt, irritability, frustration, resentment, and even anger to creep into their day as the pressure and time demands inherent on caregiving increase. Perhaps, a guide or a class on caregiving could be required prior to our graduation from high school! Not a bad thought, but I tend to think we are all born with the natural characteristics of caregiving and that some of us actually express this beautiful talent, this form of loving-kindness.

I have spent nearly 30 years caring for those with Alzheimer's disease and for each person who struggles with this disease there are two or more family members or friends who surround their loved one with support and hope. I have watched with great admiration the sweet and patient care granted by the caregivers and it has been a constant reminder of the goodness that we humans have.

To all the caregivers who read this blog, God bless you and know that you represent the best of humanity. Continue to love, since love is the best medicine, and please take some time for your own needs.

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