

Caregiver's Corner Column (March 2010)

Navigating Community Resources for Family Caregivers

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Family Aging Resources

Becoming a caregiver can happen over a long period of time or suddenly due to an emergency that results in significant changes for a loved one. We may become caregivers and not even realize we are in that role. Information provided by the Caregiver Resource Network states that caregivers are: "wives, husbands, parents, children, friends, and employees that provide physical or financial support, transportation or assistance by telephone. American families provide 80 to 90% of the medical and personal care required by our frail elderly. Nearly one in four households in America are involved in providing physical and emotional assistance to older relatives and friends." Providing what's needed is what we do even if we don't realize there's a name for it. Being a caregiver can be rewarding and very challenging at the same time. Fortunately for caregivers, there are organizations to turn to, support groups to join, and services available to help navigate the journey.

Often the issues needing attention require multiple sources of assistance and it can be overwhelming to figure out where to begin. It's important to know what community resources are available for your situation. There are several agencies that provide services, referrals, and education. The Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan (616-456- 5664), Gerontology Network (616-456-6135), HHS, Options (616- 9569440), and Senior Neighbors, Inc. (616-459-6019) are excellent sources to contact. Assistance through the Kent County Senior Millage is available through these organizations. Every situation is unique, depending on the circumstances of the caregivers and care receiver. The following are suggestions when researching and obtaining services:

- There are many organizations that address the needs of a specific diagnose or circumstance. Examples are the Alzheimer's Association, American Cancer Society, American Heart Association and Alcoholics Anonymous. The contact information for these and other organizations can be found in the Social Service section of the yellow pages, on the web, and mlive.com. These organizations often offer support groups, providing an opportunity to share with others who are dealing with similar issues.
- When obtaining services, ask for a referral from someone you trust. Contact referral sources to request information about the provider and services provided.
- Verify the credentials of professionals you are interested in by checking with the State of Michigan website or calling them. You can obtain information about all the Assisted Living facilities, Long Term Care facilities, Adult Foster Care, and Skilled Rehabilitation Centers in the same way.
- Contact information for private non-medical or skilled care home health services can be found in the yellow pages sections for Home Health Services and Nurses and Nursing

Home section, on the web, and m.live.com. Other providers and services can be found in the same way by researching their profession or service listings.

- Ask your physician for resource/referral information related to your specific situation.

Taking care of yourself, as well as your loved one, may seem an impossible task. Attempting to do everything on your own will affect your ability to cope, having the potential to impact your health, emotional state, financial situation, and relationships. If possible, develop a plan of action, within the family, to address the needs of the care receiver. At times, the family may not be able to work out a plan. Obtaining the assistance of a professional, trained to facilitate a family discussion, may improve the ability of the family to work together. Asking for help from your support system, joining a support group, going for counseling, contacting community resources, protecting your health, and educating yourself are all powerful tools for taking care of yourself.

Caregiver's Corner is provided as a public service of the **Caregiver Resource Network**. The Caregiver Resource Network is a collaboration of West Michigan organizations dedicated to providing for the needs and welfare of family and professional caregivers within the community. Funded by the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan with Older American's Act Title III-E, Family Caregiver Support funds. For more information consult our website at www.CaregiverResource.net or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664.

