

## Patient & Family Information Series



### Caregiver Role Strain

Caring for a loved one is an act that requires sacrifice and commitment. Though it can be a positive experience, the nature of providing care can create challenges of its own. One of the challenges that we see in the hospice environment is that of '*caregiver role strain*'.

Caregiver role strain happens when a caregiver experiences heightened stress and pressure related to taking on the responsibility of providing essential services to someone you love while they are sick.

Caregivers may feel:

- ♦ they are unqualified to provide adequate care
- ♦ the financial burden related to juggling work outside of the home and care needs inside of the home
- ♦ an increased sense of responsibility
- ♦ changes in their relationship or their role in their relationship
- ♦ changes in family life
- ♦ social isolation due to caregiving responsibilities



#### *Risk Factors associated with Caregiver Role Strain*

Though caring for a family member is not the responsibility of a single person, families will often identify someone who is the 'primary caregiver'. This person is often the one who manages the caregiving responsibilities, assists with medical appointments, receives and communicates information to and from providers and family members, or makes decisions about their loved one.

These tasks can feel overwhelming and challenging if the caregiver does not receive the support that is needed.

Additional risk factors for caregiver role strain can include:

- ♦ insufficient training of the caregiver
- ♦ living with the person you are caring for
- ♦ history of mental health issues; depression, anxiety
- ♦ a feeling that there are no other choices other than being a caregiver



Though caregiving affects individuals differently, caregiver role strain can show up in different ways and create a variety of symptoms. If you experience any of these listed below, talk to your home care team.

### *Physical Symptoms*

Sleeping too little OR too much  
Chronic tiredness & exhaustion  
Change in appetite or weight  
Crying easily and often  
Frequent headaches or body pain  
Using alcohol or drugs to cope

### *Emotional Symptoms*

Becoming easily irritable or angry  
Social withdrawal  
Loss of interest in hobbies or activities  
Feeling worthless or guilty  
Trouble concentrating  
Feeling overwhelmed or constantly worried

### *Tips for managing and reducing caregiver role strain*

Though the need for caregiving is constantly present, we have found that the caregiver can do some things to help them reduce the potential for, or experience of strain. Research has found that caregivers ***who have support and an understanding relationship*** have experienced better outcomes than those without those benefits. The following are some tips, provided by other caregivers:

- ♦ Remain focused on what you are able to do, not what you think you should be able to do.
- ♦ Identify a support team who can help you. This team may include:
  - ♦ family members
  - ♦ friends
  - ♦ agencies: home health, hospice, respite care, Senior Services
  - ♦ faith community
- ♦ When your support system is around, utilize that time to take care of yourself.
- ♦ Utilize FMLA resources and consider taking a break from your regular employment.
- ♦ Manage your own health care needs. Now is **not** the time to let your health issues go. It may be tempting to think, “Oh, I will take care of that later” but this can create larger issues when later finally arrives.
- ♦ Find ways to care for your body, mind, and spirit. Go for a walk, take a yoga class, practice deep breathing, do some stretching every morning, read, pray, talk to a trusted friend.

### **Other useful persons or sites for more information:**

Your Ancora Medical Social Services Team has verbal and written information and resources.

AARP - Website has information and support @ <https://www.aarp.org/caregiving/>

NHPCO - Website has resources to assist with caregiving questions @ <https://www.nhpco.org/>

National Alliance for Caregiving - Website has guidebooks on different topics @ <https://www.caregiving.org/guidebooks/>



Your ANCORA Medical Social Services Team is available to support you. Please reach out to them with any questions or concerns at 208-452-2672.