

More Men Caring For Aging Parents

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In our culture, women have traditionally held the role of caregiver within the family. Twenty years ago, the New York Times wrote how the “burden” of caring for older family members was falling on daughters and daughters-in-law. It is no longer referred to as a burden, but as a normal and expected life passage. And in 2012, it is no longer a “daughter’s issue.” The most recent figures from the Alzheimer’s Association show that the balance of family care giving is getting close to even, with 59% of caregivers women, but 41% men.

As social roles have adjusted in other areas of life, men are taking an active role as well in helping their parents or older relatives with life style changes and responsibilities. Several things have contributed to this change in perception. Men of the Baby Boom generation generally consider it more acceptable to be nurturers, something that was a challenging concept even a generation ago. The divorce rate has increased, leaving many men single who may

otherwise have depended on their wives to provide care. Families have become smaller; fewer siblings mean fewer options.

Most men who do take on the role of assisting their aging loved ones do so out of concern and choice. They report a sense of giving back to those who nurtured them. However, while men have become more comfortable in a non-traditional care giving function, there are still some hazards that they need to be aware of in order to maintain their own health and well being.

If you are going to be the caregiver, establish from the beginning what kind of assistance is necessary and what you will be providing. There is an entire spectrum of help that could be needed, from things as simple as a daily phone call and monthly bill paying to exhaustive 24/7 care. Incorporate other family members in whatever plan you have. Grown (or growing) grandchildren can make a daily phone call. The entire family can take part in a weekly visit to do grocery shopping or simply visit. Sharing the tasks makes them that much more manageable. It is also an excellent way to develop new traditions and bonding within the family. When you are all joined together in a common mission, you learn things about yourselves and each other.

If your loved one has more critical needs, it is essential to develop a network for yourself to support you through the maze of bureaucracy and decision making. The higher level of care needed, the more crucial it is to obtain professional assistance in identifying and organizing the care.

In this case, a Professional Geriatric Care Manager is an excellent resource. A Geriatric Care Manager is a health care professional committed to supporting older adults and their families in maintaining independence, dignity and quality of life. Utilizing their training, knowledge and extensive experience, a Care Manager can assist you all with planning and arranging the many elements of life changes.

When an older loved one has issues that require a great deal of attention and time, it is vital to recognize one person cannot do it all alone. Incorporating assistance from other family members and/or professionals becomes more than just a nice thing to do, it becomes a necessity. A caregiver has to find a balance in order to keep themselves physically and emotionally healthy. By making the most of all the support you have around you, it can be incredibly rewarding to provide care to an aging adult who once took care of you.