



spotlight on health

How To Care For The Caregivers

by *Mathy Mezey, RN, EdD, FAAN* (NAPSA)—Some 50 million adults provide care for an older or chronically ill family member at home. Providing such care can be richly rewarding at times, yet considerably burdensome at others. Sometimes the stress on family caregivers can leave them feeling overwhelmed.

Caring for an ill relative is never easy. Challenges can range from the physical (lifting an elderly relative in and out of a chair), to the financial (inability to work outside the home) and to the social (canceled vacations or other plans). In some cases, caregivers may experience physical illness, depression, grief, and changes in their own relationships as a result of the care they provide.

Friends and other family members can play a critical role in caring for the caregiver by watching for signs of stress and making sure that strained caregivers get the help they need. Some of the signs that a caregiver may be heading for burn-out include:

- overt sadness
- being short-tempered
- sleeplessness or fatigue
- worried about finances
- concern over loss of privacy or social contacts
- feeling heavily overwhelmed and confined by the caregiving tasks

These feelings can combine to compromise the caregiver's health—as well as the health of the person receiving care. The John A. Hartford Foundation Institute for Geriatric Nursing, based at New York University, has developed a 13-item questionnaire that can be used to quickly iden-

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tify family caregivers who should seek help and support. It focuses on some of the symptoms mentioned above. It can be found at: www.hartfordign.org/publications/trythis/issue14.pdf.

If you see friends or family members exhibiting some of these signs and symptoms, talk to them about getting help and support. Encourage them to:

- Use available resources such as offers of help from friends, family, and neighbors
- Use community support programs such as respite care programs
- Reach out to a health care professional who can help evaluate them, their loved-one's condition and suggest care plans

- Visit these Web sites for more information: The National Family Caregivers Association (www.nfcares.org) offers many helpful tips on coping with various aspects of caregiving. The Web site of *Today's Caregiver* magazine, www.caregiver.com, also provides helpful articles and a discussion forum. The Alzheimer's Association (www.alz.org)

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