

Helping To Solve The Caregiver Paradox

by Emma Dickison

(NAPSA)—When I was 17 years old, the matriarch of my family, my grandmother, suffered her fifth stroke. Afterward, her mind was still sharp, but physically she was never the same. She needed care 24 hours a day. In the summers and on holi-



Dickison

days, we would drive to Kentucky from our home in Florida to spend time with family and help care for Nan. When I was a senior in college, my mother suffered her third stroke after a surgery and took a turn for the worse cognitively and physically. Six months after my mom's stroke, my dad was diagnosed with terminal cancer.

Life spiraled out of control much faster than anyone could have anticipated. My family and I felt overwhelmed, stressed, confused and frustrated that we did not know where to turn for help.

Nearly half of American adults are members of the so-called sandwich generation, faced with caring for the escalating needs of aging grandparents, parents and their own children at the same time.

What sets this generation apart is the sheer number of relatives who will need to be cared for over the coming decades. An alarming 76 million people, or about a quarter of the U.S. population, are baby boomers. In the next 15 years, more than one in five Americans will be over the age of 65. While these boomers' increasing medical and financial needs continually receive appropriate and important attention, what is usually missed is the effect this will have on families.

On average, family caregivers provide 20 hours of work weekly to aging relatives. These family caregivers lose their sense of self and are caught somewhere between daughter, caregiver and parent—stuck in a Caregiver Paradox. And they begin to feel guilty, resentful and angry about their situation.

How will we provide the care our aging loved ones require when most of us are already swamped with the demands of a career and taking care of our own children? How can we possibly fill so many roles all at once?

In order to meet this growing challenge, Americans require a stronger support system—we have to be willing to accept help.

Conversations about aging need to happen sooner. Many of us



Nearly half of American adults are faced with caring for the escalating needs of their aging grandparents, parents and children at the same time.

have an idea of what will happen when Mom or Dad starts to need more help at home, but how many of us have actually talked to them about it?

The signs that our parents need extra help eventually become impossible to ignore. Whether it's the piling up of dirty laundry, missed doses of important medications or concerns about driving, most of us will have to acknowledge at some point that Mom is getting older, or that Dad isn't invincible like we used to believe. My hope is that when you get to that point, you and your loved ones will be ready.

I know from personal experience how care needs escalate quickly and without warning. I see it in my line of work every single day. When they take a look back, family caregivers notice how helping with a few chores "here and there" quickly became hours of running errands, cleaning the house, doing laundry, cooking, bathing, and helping Mom and Dad with almost all their daily needs. The truth becomes clear only in hindsight: They traded in their role of daughter or son for that of caregiver, and they didn't even know it was happening.

Let's start to have conversations about our parents' and other elderly loved ones' aging plans earlier and more frequently.

Emma Dickison is president of Cincinnati-based Home Helpers, one of the nation's leading home care franchises specializing in comprehensive services for seniors, new and expectant mothers, those recovering from illness or injury, and individuals facing lifelong challenges.

Home Helpers' sole mission is to make life easier for its clients. Find out how Emma can help make your life easier by e-mailing her at emma@homehelpershomecare.com.