

Taking on the Role of Caregiver

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You may be a spouse, partner, family member or close friend, and are now entering the role of a caregiver to someone who has been diagnosed with cancer. This can be a very difficult role, and how you adapt to this new role is not only challenging for you, but also for the patient. You have probably not been trained for this job, but will be expected to offer the cancer patient physical and emotional care. There are many caregiving tips and resources to help you find out what you need to know in providing the support, comfort and advice they will need during this journey.

What types of services does a caregiver provide to a cancer patient?

Each caregiver has a unique role, just as each cancer patient has individual challenges that they must face. Here are some simple ways that you can be supportive:

Communicate

When talking with someone who has cancer, it's important to listen. Let them tell you how they feel, and acknowledge that you are open to talking whenever they feel like it. Don't judge them, or try to change the subject. Or, if the person doesn't feel like talking right now, you can offer to listen later.

If you are asked to accompany the cancer patient to a doctor's appointment, be prepared to take notes. Unless you have received permission from the patient, allow the patient to carry the dialogue with the doctor.

Once the medical team has determined a treatment plan, get a copy of the plan in writing and ask questions about any points that are unclear. If you are accompanying the patient to a treatment, be encouraging and supportive.

Be Realistic About What's Ahead

Never minimize what a cancer patient is going through. Treatments can be both emotionally and physically taxing. And treatments plan are just as individually different as the cancer can be. Reactions to the treatment can be minimal or vastly tolling. It's completely normal for patients to experience days when they are depressed, lonely, or afraid. Talk about the future. Hope and faith are very important.

Kindness Counts

Simple gestures can lift a cancer patient's spirits. There are many things that a caregiver can do to help a person with cancer. Put together a grocery list, shop for food and prepare meals ahead. Clean the house and do laundry. Help process monthly bills and mail payments. Organize a notebook with medications, treatment plans and physician information. Even a surprise of a manicure or pedicure can be a positive experience.

Legal and Financial Affairs

If important issues such as wills, living wills and medical power of attorney have not been taken care of, you may have to assist the cancer patient in securing an attorney to finalize these documents. Even if the cancer is not terminal, it is a task that everyone needs to take care of at some point. You may also want to assist the patient by contacting their financial advisor to review details such as bank accounts, tax documents, stocks, bonds, mutual funds, or CDs.

Organize Family and Friends

Regardless of where family and friends reside, they may want to be involved. Organize a family meeting, even if by phone. Discuss different tasks, action plans and treatment plans. Make sure those that want to be involved can be involved. It's important to include the patient in these discussions, too.

Caregivers Need Support, Too

Remember taking care of you is very important. Make sure you get plenty of rest, good nutrition and, if care is for an extended period of time, arrange for a vacation. Make time to reduce your stress – include meditation, exercise or other forms of relaxation to your routine. Reach out to others and ask for help when you need it. Take advantage of caregiver support groups and websites for support and resources. Check with your cancer center's staff for additional tips on providing care and contact information for local support groups.

Contact Outside Help If Needed

Cancer patients want to maintain as much independence as possible, but when it is necessary, and outside help is needed, a caregiver should be honest with the patient. Ultimately, the cancer patient needed to control as many decisions as possible about their care.

Caring for someone going through cancer is a very demanding role, but being a caregiver can reveal your hidden strength and enrich your family life. It requires patience, flexibility, courage and a good sense of humor. It is not easy to be a caregiver, but it can be very rewarding, providing you with a deep sense of meaning and pride.

(Source: <http://www.cancer.org/treatment/caregivers> and <http://www.curetoday.com>)