

## Caring for Your Loved One Article #1

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As a geriatric care manager I often make visits to individuals within the community. When I was visiting a client in an apartment building, in which older adults reside, I witnessed two caregiving situations that were strikingly different.

The first one occurred when I was going into the building: A middle-aged woman and her mother were coming out. The mother was walking slowly, with a walker, toward her daughter's car. The daughter was standing at her car and yelled "Hurry up Mom; we're going to be late!" The daughter sounded angry, tired and frustrated. Her mother said "I'm hurrying as fast as I can dear," as she struggled across the parking lot pushing her walker. The next situation occurred as I was leaving the building: A van was blocking my car in its parking spot. A woman, sitting next to a van in her wheelchair, told me that her son was helping her get into the van. She proudly said to me, "He helps me with everything I need, and is so kind and patient."

My first thought was what a contrast in approaches -- kindness and consideration versus impatience and disrespect. After further consideration I think that the situations are far more complicated and that the daughter deserves some empathy and understanding. She even deserves some support and help. **Caregiving is not an easy job.**

At some point in our lives many of us will be caregivers. The term caregiver refers to anyone who provides help to someone else who needs assistance. We can find ourselves in the caregiver role while we are a parent, spouse, child, sibling, partner, friend or neighbor. Information from the Family Caregiver Alliance states that the "typical U.S. caregiver is a 46 year old woman who works outside of the home and spends more than 20 hours per week providing unpaid care to her mother."

The stressors of caregiving can be overwhelming. These stressors may cause someone to get to the point of yelling at their elderly mother to "hurry up" as the woman from the above story did. Is it just a matter of personality disposition or is it simply that the individual is very stressed and has too many responsibilities?

At times caregiving can seem like a thankless job. However, even if the care recipient cannot or does not express their gratitude, ultimately the gift of taking care of someone can be rewarding and self-satisfying. If you are a caregiver find some time for yourself – it can help reinvigorate you and combat the stress of caregiving. Find some time to relax and participate in activities you enjoy. Get adequate rest which will help ensure that you are able to take care of both yourself and your loved one. Other ways to take care of yourself: let other people help, exercise, know your limits, eat a well-balanced diet and talk to friends and family about what you're going through. Participation in a caregiver support group can also be a helpful option.

In future columns we will deal more with caregiving, caregiver issues and resources and tools to help the caregiver.