

CAREGIVERS - YOU'RE NOT ALONE

By: Tim Mitchell, Fund Development Coordinator, Senior Care Partners PACE

I walked into the home of an elderly couple to talk with the caregiver. Her 81-year-old husband was becoming more and more difficult to deal with at home. His dementia symptoms were rapidly changing. Once a very calm, caring, and loving individual, he had become almost completely non-verbal and very anxious.

I asked, "How are you holding up?" The 80-year-old wife looking at me suddenly dropped her head downward as if to hide her face. But, just below her well-kept curly gray hair I could see her eyes becoming red and tears began streaming down her aged cheeks. She whispered, "It's getting very hard."

For anyone who has ever been on the caregiving side of the aging process, you will likely be able to identify with those words. Caregiving is emotionally, psychologically, and physically taxing and sometimes it feels very overwhelming. It is not uncommon to hear things like, "I don't know how much more I can take."

There is no other way to put it, caregiving is difficult. It often begins with noticing certain signs or symptoms as you observe your loved one over the course of time. You conclude you must get your beloved family member to a doctor to find out "what's really going on." Then, the diagnosis comes. It's Alzheimer's disease, or dementia, or Parkinson's, or congestive heart failure, or COPD, or any number of debilitating conditions that will require increased caregiving as the disease progresses. This stage of realization can be an emotional setback, but the caregiver rallies, digs his or her heels in, and declares, "We're going to get through this together."



While there are many rewards to caregiving, throughout the process there is an unfolding reality of learning to "live with loss." But, the good news is, you're not alone! Today there are many resources available to help families caring for loved ones at home.

The person you care for may still have many years of life, but that life often is rapidly changing. As a caregiver, your first loss is typically the loss of living life the way you used to live. You may have to have your family member move in with you, or you move in with them, or you check in on them multiple times a day, or you provide transportation to multiple medical appointments every month, or you find yourself making frequent trips to the Emergency Room or hospital. For some, these changes come more gradually than for others.

You realize that not only is the person you

love slipping away from you, but your very life is suddenly turned upside. Your priorities change, your schedule changes, and you give up many things you always enjoyed doing. And, it's all because you love the person for whom you are now caring.

Unfortunately, there is no instruction manual handed to the caregiver at the time of diagnosis. It's more like on-the-job training. But, the good news is, you're not alone! Today there are many resources available to help families caring for loved ones at home. Many families have determined to honor the wishes of their older family member and do everything possible to allow them to live the remainder of their life in the home they love.

Senior Care Partners P.A.C.E. (formerly CentraCare) is one of the best resources you will find to help you care for your aging loved one. Their entire team of highly qualified health care professionals "partner" with the participant and their caregiver(s) to provide the most personalized care possible. The ultimate goal is to provide a higher quality of life for the participant, as well as their caregiver, while enabling the participant to remain in their home for as long as possible.

Most of the services provided by Senior Care Partners P.A.C.E. are under one roof, conveniently located inside the Kool Family Center at 200 W Michigan Avenue in Battle Creek.

Remember, you're not alone. To learn more about the services provided by Senior Care Partners P.A.C.E. and how they can support you as a caregiver, you may call (269) 441-9319 or visit the website at www.seniorcarepartnersMI.org.



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Call us to find out if Senior Care Partners P.A.C.E. is right for you or someone you love.

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